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ABSTRACT

This handbook is one of a series developed by the Texas Education Agency in response to requests to provide schools with additional information concerning the written composition portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The handbook focuses on exit level grades 9 through 12. Following an introduction, the handbook is in two parts. Part 1 contains general information on the writing process and how that process applies to the TAAS exit level writing test. This section includes discussions of prewriting, elaboration, revision, and editing. Part 2 shows the scoring criteria and sample papers with detailed annotations for persuasive writing, which is the only type of writing eligible for testing at the exit level. Three appendixes present TAAS writing objectives and instructional targets at the exit level, describe the eligible type of writing at the exit level, and give an explanation of purpose/mode at the exit level. (SR)

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TAAS and the Writing Process: A Composition Handbook

Exit Level
Grades 9 through 12

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TAAS

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills

1991

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TAAS AND THE WRITING PROCESS:

A COMPOSITION HANDBOOK

EXIT LEVEL

GRADES 9 THROUGH 12

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TAAS AND THE WRITING PROCESS: A COMPOSITION HANDBOOK

EXIT LEVEL

GRADES 9 THROUGH 12

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INTRODUCTION

Background

During the 1989-1990 school year, the Texas Education Agency received numerous requests to provide schools with additional information concerning the written composition portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). A series of handbooks, entitled *TAAS and the Writing Process: A Composition Handbook*, has been developed in response to these requests. Designed to assist Texas educators in preparing students for the TAAS writing test at Grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 (exit level), these handbooks serve the following purposes:

- to show the connections between classroom writing and the TAAS writing test
- to provide information on the writing process and how this process can be applied by students when writing for TAAS
- to offer detailed information on the scoring of the TAAS written composition
- to provide sample papers, along with detailed annotations, for each type of writing eligible for assessment on the TAAS test

We hope that districts will find these handbooks to be a valuable resource as their teachers work to improve students' performance on the TAAS writing test.

Questions and comments regarding these publications should be addressed to:

Division of Student Assessment
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
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Organization of This Handbook

Part 1 contains general information on the writing process and how that process applies to the TAAS exit level writing test. This section includes discussions of prewriting, elaboration, revision, and editing. Part 2 shows the scoring criteria and sample papers with detailed annotations for persuasive writing, which is the only type of writing eligible for testing at the exit level.

From TEAMS to TAAS: The Writing Test

The TAAS exit level writing test differs from the TEAMS language arts test in two important ways. First, the student is required to write a persuasive composition on a specified topic. This topic will most likely focus on a real-life social issue that has meaning for exit level students. In addition, the multiple-choice component of the writing test is significantly different, both in philosophy and in format. Whereas the TEAMS test evaluated students' language skills in isolation, the TAAS test assesses these skills in a meaningful context. That is, the multiple-choice items for each objective are based on a series of written passages and require the student to read the passages carefully in order to answer the items correctly. Assessing language skills in this format requires students to use the same kinds of skills that they use when editing or proofreading their own writing--skills such as locating and identifying errors in a piece of writing. The multiple-choice component of the TAAS writing test is thus more closely linked to the process of writing than was its predecessor.

Helping Students to Write: The Writing Process

Many effective teachers of writing focus on the writing process itself as well as on the end product of writing, teaching students how to go about a writing task from start to finish. Through modeling and frequent practice, students learn to generate ideas through prewriting, to develop those ideas into drafts, to rethink and clarify a piece of writing through revision, and to clean up surface errors through editing and proofreading. In these classrooms emphasis is placed on the content of the student's message. That is, the student's writing is viewed as an attempt to communicate ideas to the reader, who responds in some way to the message the student is trying to convey. Students have frequent opportunities to:

- write on topics that are meaningful to them
- write for a variety of purposes and in a variety of formats
- experiment with different ways of expressing ideas
- share their writing with others
- give and receive feedback

This emphasis on writing to communicate encourages students to take compositional risks--that is, to use language creatively without being hampered by concerns about mechanical correctness. The freedom to take chances allows students to explore different ways to express ideas and to develop confidence in their writing ability.

The Writing Process and TAAS

The student who is accustomed to writing and has written for many different purposes will more likely have acquired skills that can be applied to any

writing task. Therefore, the best preparation for both the written composition and the multiple-choice portions of the TAAS test is to provide students with frequent opportunities to apply the writing process in the classroom. The student who is experienced in the process of writing will likely internalize this process and should then be able to apply it when writing the TAAS composition or when performing the editing/proofreading tasks required on the multiple-choice portion of the writing test. He or she will be able to generate ideas, to develop those ideas into a draft, to revise a draft, and to edit and proofread for surface errors, using skills and strategies acquired through classroom writing. It is particularly important that each student be familiar enough with the writing process to use it independently since the teacher cannot provide any assistance to the student during either portion of the writing test.

Focused Holistic Scoring

A process called focused holistic scoring is used to evaluate the TAAS written composition. This scoring procedure is "holistic" because the piece of writing is considered as a whole. It is "focused" in that the piece of writing is evaluated according to preestablished criteria. These criteria correspond to the first four objectives listed in the *TAAS English Language Arts Writing Objectives and Measurement Specifications*. They are:

Objective 1: The student will respond appropriately in a written composition to the purpose/audience specified in a given topic.

Objective 2: The student will organize ideas in a written composition on a given topic.

Objective 3: The student will demonstrate control of the English language in a written composition on a given topic.

Objective 4: The student will generate a written composition that develops/supports/elaborates the central idea stated in a given topic.

Each TAAS response is evaluated according to the extent to which it reflects mastery of these four objectives. The response is scored on a scale of 1 (low) to 4 (high). A student may also receive a rating of 0, indicating that the response could not be scored.

In order to meet minimum expectations on the TAAS writing test, a student must receive a rating of at least 2 on the composition, which indicates that the response is minimally successful, as well as answer correctly the equivalent of 70% of the multiple-choice items. To demonstrate mastery on the writing test, a student must receive a rating of 3 or 4 on the composition and master all three multiple-choice objectives (objectives 5, 6, and 7). Academic Recognition, the highest level of excellence, is awarded to a student only if he or she receives

a rating of 4 on the composition and masters all objectives on each subject area test, correctly answering 95% of the items.

Criteria Assessed on the TAAS Written Composition

Purpose/Audience

Individuals write for specific purposes and audiences. The way an individual writes depends on his or her purpose for writing and the audience addressed. The TAAS written composition assesses the student's ability to write for a specified purpose and audience. Only the persuasive purpose is eligible for testing at the exit level. Additional information on this purpose can be found in the *TAAS English Language Arts Writing Objectives and Measurement Specifications* and in the appendix of this document.

Organization

To communicate successfully, a writer must organize his or her ideas in a clear and logical manner, one that is appropriate for the intended purpose of the response. The TAAS written composition assesses the student's ability to use a particular mode, or method, of organization and to proceed logically within that mode. At Grade 3, 5, 7, and 9, an attempt is made to cue students to a dominant mode so that they will use that method of organization in their responses. At the exit level only, the student is not required to use a specified mode. Rather, the student may choose whichever mode or combination of modes he or she considers to be most effective for accomplishing the persuasive purpose of the composition. Additional information about organization can be found in the *TAAS English Language Arts Writing Objectives and Measurement Specifications*.

Language Control

In order to communicate effectively, the writer must show sufficient control of language so that the reader has no difficulty understanding what the writer is attempting to say. The TAAS written composition assesses the student's ability to use language in a clear and precise manner. Since TAAS responses do not represent "polished" responses, however, some errors in language mechanics, sentence structure, and usage may occur. The student is not penalized for these kinds of errors unless they are severe enough to impair meaning.

Elaboration

The successful writer is able to develop his or her ideas in such a way that the reader understands what the writer is attempting to communicate. The TAAS writing test assesses the student's ability to develop ideas clearly, logically, and thoroughly. For a more detailed explanation of elaboration, see pages 17-24.

Additional Information on the TAAS Writing Test

The *TAAS English Language Arts Writing Objectives and Measurement Specifications* provide detailed information about both the multiple-choice portion of the TAAS writing test and the written composition. With respect to the multiple-choice items, the measurement specifications describe the objectives (core concepts) and instructional targets (specific skills reflecting the essential elements) eligible for assessment, as well as the types of items that may appear on the test. In addition, the specifications provide sample items for each instructional target and an appendix listing the usage, capitalization, and punctuation rules eligible for testing.

With regard to the written composition, the measurement specifications provide general information about the nature of the persuasive writing required on TAAS, describe the characteristics of persuasive prompts and successful responses, and present a representative sample persuasive prompt.

Part 1
TAAS and the Writing Process

GENERATING AND ORGANIZING IDEAS: THE PREWRITING STAGE

What is Prewriting?

Prewriting is the process that an effective writer follows to assemble ideas and to develop communication strategies before he or she begins to write. It moves the writer from the thinking stage to the writing stage and includes any activity that helps to generate, focus, and/or organize creative thought. Prewriting involves defining the task and devising ways to accomplish that task. This planning stage is especially important because it helps to determine the writer's work in subsequent stages of the writing process.

Helping Students to Prewrite

Students are often unaware of the many stages that a piece of writing may go through before completion because they have only seen final finished products. Consequently, they may be prone to begin a writing assignment by preparing a "final" draft rather than by engaging in any preliminary activities. When their one-draft compositions are less than successful, they may become frustrated and convinced that they cannot write. It is helpful for students to understand that writing involves more than a perfect recording of words, and that many successful writers do follow a step-by-step writing process. The first of these steps is prewriting.

Prewriting Strategies

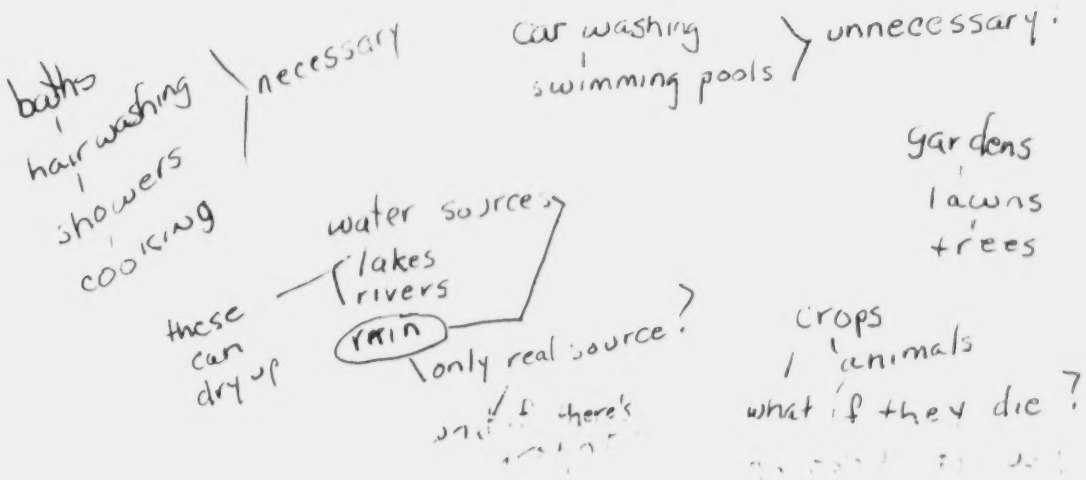
Prewriting is often regarded only as a technique for generating and focusing ideas; however, it is also useful for organizing the writer's ideas. It may include activities such as brainstorming, focused freewriting, webbing, and listing. The writer may use any of these, singly or in combination, to develop a full and detailed body of ideas that provides a solid base for a first draft.

Brainstorming

When students are first learning to use prewriting strategies, they often benefit from preliminary discussions, or oral brainstorming sessions, that relate writing topics to their own experiences. To begin the brainstorming session, the teacher gives the students a word, a phrase, a question, or a situation intended to stimulate thinking. For example, if the planned writing activity is a persuasive composition, the prompt might require the student to take a position on a controversial issue such as flag burning and to support that position with convincing reasons. During this prewriting session there are no "right" or "wrong" responses. Rather, the purpose of the activity is to generate and record ideas that will stimulate writing, and virtually any response has that potential. After gaining experience in several large group

sessions, students should be able to begin working through their prewriting in small groups. When students become familiar with oral brainstorming, it will be time for them to progress to individual written brainstorming. This is an important transition for students to make, since no group, oral, or teacher-directed prewriting is permitted during the TAAS test.

All of the prewriting examples in this handbook are based on the prompt on page 44. In the following example the student has used brainstorming to generate ideas for his or her persuasive letter.



Focused Freewriting

Focused freewriting is similar to brainstorming in that the goal is simply to generate and record as many ideas, feelings, memories, and even seemingly unrelated words and phrases as possible. Students are directed to write steadily for a certain period of time (five or ten minutes, for example) in response to a particular stimulus. The only rule is that the students must not stop writing. If they run out of ideas, they can write over and over "I'm stuck" or "I don't know what to write" until another thought comes to mind. In this exercise there should be no editing: no erasures, no crossouts, no reflecting, no correcting. The purpose of focused freewriting is to find and capture images, thoughts, feelings, or words and to get them on paper. This activity is a good way to combat the nonproductive time students spend worrying about getting started or about what to write. Focused freewriting helps them to learn to separate the producing process from the editing process.

The key factor in both brainstorming and focused freewriting is the absence of editing. During this period nothing is a "good" idea, nor is anything a "bad" idea. Later, during the drafting stage, the "best" ideas will be used, but at the time of generation, no writer knows exactly what the final draft will include or which idea is "best." In the following example, the student has used focused freewriting as preparation for his or her persuasive response.

Im not saving any water if I don't use it somebody else will use it why not me I like long showers and people like to be clean well some people maybe not JM he's always gross yuck ::: what now I don't know oh well about cleaning and washing clothes and hosing the driveway and watering the yard and why else do I pay taxes to get water and Im using it and anyway what about the Pacific Ocean anyway theyve got a machine that rinses out the salt so do that and give me my water that I want

Webbing

Some students demonstrate difficulty in narrowing a topic or focusing on a manageable portion of a larger subject. Prewriting activities can help. One prewriting activity that may help students focus on a particular topic or on a portion of a piece of writing is webbing. In the webbing process students begin by writing a word or phrase in a circle drawn in the center of the paper. As with brainstorming and focused freewriting, students begin to write down all of the responses evoked by the topic in that first circle. Each word or phrase is placed in its own circle, which is connected to a preceding circle. Because each of the words or ideas is connected to another and therefore linked to the original word, the resulting collection of ideas is somewhat more interrelated than brainstorming or focused freewriting. This technique is effective in expanding ideas in a persuasive piece. The webbing, or connecting lines, helps the student organize his or her thoughts by depicting ideas in relation to one another and to the whole. By using the web as a guide, the student will be more likely to discuss one aspect of the issue thoroughly before moving to another, thereby demonstrating an organizational strategy. In addition, webbing promotes the elaboration required for successful responses by providing a graphic display of related details that can be incorporated into the argument. The writer developed the following web before attempting to draft a response.

Listing

Listing assists in generating and organizing the writer's thoughts for persuasive writing. In the example below, the writer listed some ideas related to water conservation and then numbered the points in the order in which he or she planned to present them.

Why Limit

4 avoid waste

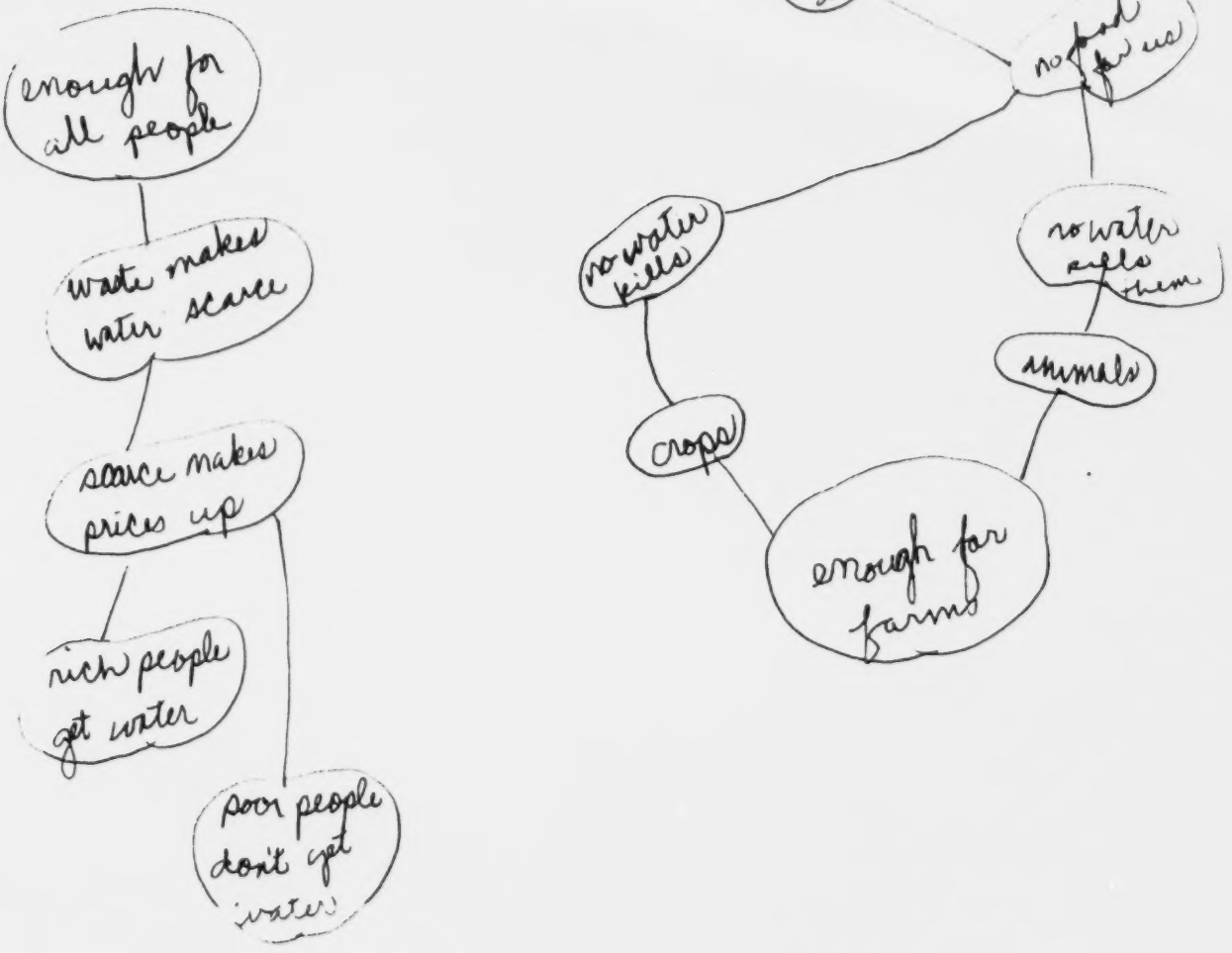
2 be sure theres enough for farms

1 protect resources

~~plans for future~~

3 be sure theres enough for all people

Although listing is helpful in generating ideas for a first draft, many students have a tendency to list only the major ideas in their writing and to leave out the elaborated support necessary for a successful response. It may be helpful for these students to use another type of prewriting in conjunction with a list in order to develop the details for his or her ideas. This writer has used two of the list entries generated on page 13 as web starting points.



Prewriting for TAAS

Although TAAS compositions do not represent "polished" writing, the content is expected to be developed, organized, and written for the correct purpose; prewriting is a useful tool for accomplishing these tasks. Students are provided with two blank pages in the test booklet on which to generate, focus, and organize their thoughts in preparation for responding to the writing prompt. They may choose to use a prewriting activity or any combination of activities, or they may write out their ideas in a draft form on those pages. Students should be encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity.

If prewriting is part of the routine classroom writing experience, students will always have a strategy to use when faced with a new writing challenge. Although the name "prewriting" suggests that it is a preliminary activity conducted only before writing begins, it is, in reality, recursive, as is the entire writing process. That is, it is quite possible that a writer would use a prewriting technique to help resolve a problem that has been revealed during the revision process. For example, if an idea needs additional elaboration, the student might use that idea as the stimulus and brainstorm to generate related details. On the other hand, if an idea lacks focus, it might be used as the center for a webbing activity so that the student can develop the relationship between that idea and others to be included in the piece. Consequently, students should be encouraged to regard the various types of prewriting techniques as tools that can be used throughout the construction of their pieces of writing.

There is no one prewriting activity that always works for every type of writing, nor is there one activity that works for every individual engaged in a particular kind of writing. However, in writing for TAAS, students experienced in the prewriting process will be able to make full use of their own prewriting strategies; and their compositions will more likely reflect the degree of specificity, elaboration, and organization required for success.

ELABORATING IDEAS: THE DRAFTING STAGE

What is Elaboration?

Elaboration is the degree to which the writer develops ideas clearly, logically, and completely in order to allow the reader to understand thoroughly what the writer is attempting to say in a piece of writing. No matter what the writer's purpose, this understanding is dependent not so much on the number of ideas the writer generates as on the quality of the development of each idea. Some writers--especially inexperienced ones--may believe that the more ideas they include or the more they write, the more effective their piece of writing will likely be. In reality, the merit of any piece of writing cannot be determined simply by the number of ideas or words it contains. For example, two ideas that are well developed produce better elaboration than six ideas that are minimally developed, just as one page of relevant, specific support is always more effective than two pages of vague or general support. It is the writer's ability to develop each idea precisely and thoroughly that determines how strong and complete the elaboration in a piece of writing will likely be.

Helping Students to Elaborate in Their Writing

While the components of form--correct language mechanics and sound organization--help to make a student's writing clear and coherent, an overemphasis on their importance may create misconceptions about what effective writing is. One widely held misconception, for example, is that mechanical correctness is the single most important criterion for effective writing. The all-too-common belief that errorless writing is "good" writing has prevented some students from recognizing the relationship between thinking and writing. Although these students possess the language mechanics to write well, they have not acquired the thinking "tools" necessary to improve the quality of the elaboration in their writing. Another misconception is that knowing certain "formulas" will always help one to write effectively. Two of the most common writing "formulas" involve beginning and ending the composition in a particular way (using, in many cases, a teacher-generated sentence), and writing the composition in a certain number of paragraphs (five paragraphs, for example) without regard for the simplicity or complexity of the writing assignment or topic. The excessive use of writing "formulas" may promote the idea that effective writing can be more easily accomplished--and meaning more easily created--if the writer follows certain predetermined steps. The reality, however, is that effective writing requires careful thought. It is dependent on the writer's understanding of his or her purpose, as well as on his or her ability to organize ideas logically, to maintain consistent control of written language, and to generate and develop ideas in a way that will make the text richer and more accessible, allowing the reader to appreciate and understand completely what the writer is attempting to say.

In every piece of writing, no matter what its purpose, the writer must generate, organize, and develop ideas. Although all of these activities require the writer to create meaning, it is through the writer's development, or elaboration, of ideas that this meaning is communicated. In order to develop ideas in their own writing, students must first understand what effective elaboration is. Only after students have this basic knowledge can they take the next step: applying these principles to their own writing so that each generated idea is relevant, specific, and thoroughly developed.

Developing in Students a Critical Frame of Mind

One of the primary purposes of the prewriting stage of the writing process is to generate and record as many ideas as possible, without consideration for whether they will ultimately be "usable." At that stage, the writer must not be concerned with the quality of the ideas--that is, how relevant/irrelevant or effective/ineffective they are. However, once the writer is ready to choose those ideas he or she wishes to include in the first draft, adopting a critical frame of mind becomes necessary, for it enables the writer to make sound judgments about both the quality of the ideas and the most effective means of developing them.

The writer who adopts a critical frame of mind will be able to

(1) focus on what is "good" about the development of each idea so that he or she can shape each one into something that creates meaning, and

(2) discard any idea that is irrelevant, general, or vague and replace it with one that is relevant and specific.

Applying these critical judgments to each generated idea helps the writer to distinguish those sentences that contribute to the response from those sentences that do not. Once the writer determines which ideas to develop, he or she can "target" those ideas and begin to add the detail necessary to improve their effectiveness and to strengthen the response as a whole.

Below is an excerpt from student response P-3 (page 50), which is based on the persuasive prompt on page 44 of this handbook. Following this excerpt is an explanation of how the writer may improve the quality of the elaboration.

> Many people in the communities across the state of Texas depend on water for business functions as well as basic needs. I believe it is the state's job to look to the future and act upon it now so that the people of Texas can live with the limits of water supplies now rather than none tomorrow.
>
> Some people think since they pay taxes, they should have the freedom to use as much water as they want. For example, one person might need more water than another person.

This excerpt constitutes the entire substance of the writer's response. In this response the writer takes a position in favor of limiting water use, but the elaboration he or she generates to support this position is weak in several ways. First, sentence one in the first paragraph merely states that "people...depend on water for business functions as well as basic needs." Because the writer does not explain what he or she means by either "business functions" or "basic needs," this reason lacks the specificity and development necessary to be persuasive. In sentence two of the first paragraph, the writer attempts to link present water needs to the future but fails to provide enough information to make this connection clear. In addition, paragraph two presents arguments that support the other side of the issue. Because the writer does not refute those arguments, the paragraph as a whole does not contribute to the author's purpose (which is to convince the reader that water limits are necessary) and therefore does not qualify as elaboration.

To achieve more effective elaboration, the writer would first need to further develop the ideas introduced in paragraph one so that they would provide more convincing support for her or her position. Also, since paragraph two does not support the writer's position, he or she would need to either eliminate the entire paragraph or refute the ideas introduced in it so that those ideas would not be detrimental to the writer's argument. Strengthening the elaboration in both of these paragraphs would increase the overall persuasiveness of the response.

Following is an example of how a student might revise the excerpt above to improve the quality of the elaboration. Note that the two reasons ("business functions" and "basic needs") stated in sentence one of the first paragraph have been separated and that each is now the focus of a single paragraph. The ideas expressed in paragraph two of the excerpt have now been refuted. (The underlined sections represent changes or additions.)

Many people in the communities across the state of Texas depend on water for business functions. For example, farmers need water for crops and animals so that Texas can have the food they need. Fire departments need a water supply to put out fires. Think about how scared people would be if they knew their house could catch on fire and they knew there was no water for the fire department to use. Also, construction companies couldn't build new houses or department stores or highways if there wasn't any water.

People in Texas also depend on water for basic needs. We couldn't take showers or baths and we would be dirty all of the time. We couldn't keep our houses clean, which would probably be unsanitary. We might even get sick if there was a shortage of drinking water. All of these problems would make our lives miserable. If we want to have enough water in the future for businesses and for individuals, we have to limit supplies now. That's why I believe it is the state's job to limit the use of water in homes. By doing this, the state will make sure that the people of Texas can live with the limits of water supplies now rather than have none tomorrow.

Some people do not want to limit, though. They think since they pay taxes, they should have the freedom to use as much water as they want. They argue that one person might need more water than another person. Although I understand that people pay taxes so they can have better lives and that limiting how much water you use might be hard, it's important for everyone to share in the responsibility to save our water supply. Having a water supply for everyone in the future is more important than being comfortable now!

In the revision of this excerpt, the writer's ability to rework those areas that were originally weak has strengthened the clarity, logic, and development of ideas, thereby improving the overall quality of the elaboration in that part of the response.

Elaborating for TAAS

Elaboration is an important component of successful writing on the TAAS test, for the effectiveness of the student's response is, in large measure, determined by the quality of the development of ideas--that is, how clearly and thoroughly the student develops those ideas that are relevant to the specified purpose.

However, many students encounter their greatest difficulties on the TAAS test in the area of elaboration. They may receive an unsuccessful rating of 1 on the composition simply because they failed to support their ideas with enough details. Because the responses contain merely unelaborated ideas or too few elaborated ideas, they lack the information or explanation necessary to be minimally successful. These responses are considered skeletal because there are simply too many places in the text where the student needed to "tell more." In fact, it is often what the student has failed to say rather than what he or she has said that causes the response to receive a 1.

There is no single method through which support or elaboration may be achieved on TAAS; depending upon the purpose for writing, the writer may use a number of different methods to develop ideas effectively. Whatever the writer's purpose, however, including information that does not add either explicitly or implicitly to the reader's understanding of the response is contrary to the whole notion of meaningful elaboration.

The quality of the support and/or elaboration in TAAS responses is assessed in terms of how completely each idea is developed. Teachers can improve students' ability to develop ideas by teaching them what elaboration is and how it is achieved in a written response. Once students can distinguish between effective and ineffective elaboration, they can learn to develop their ideas more clearly, logically, and completely.

Students may also benefit from understanding that there are levels of elaboration that range from minimal to thorough. Knowing these levels may help students learn to evaluate the extent to which they have developed their ideas in any piece of writing.

Below are general definitions of the levels of elaboration as they apply to TAAS responses. Following these definitions is a more specific explanation of elaboration in persuasive writing.

Extension

An idea is extended when it is minimally elaborated--that is, when the writer links to it one or two additional specific pieces of pertinent information.

A Somewhat Elaborated Idea

If the writer links to the extension of an idea one or two more specific pieces of pertinent information that add to the reader's understanding of the idea, that idea is considered somewhat elaborated.

A Moderately Elaborated Idea

If the writer further clarifies a somewhat elaborated idea by describing or explaining it in even greater detail, the idea becomes moderately elaborated.

When the writer adds specific pieces of pertinent information to each idea, he or she creates more effective elaboration. This effectiveness is the result of the "layering" of pieces of information. "Layering" may be defined as the way in which the pieces of information that are pertinent to each generated idea are connected so as to support the idea logically and specifically. The more each idea is layered, the greater, or deeper, the reader's understanding of the idea--and the response as a whole--will likely be.

Elaboration in Persuasive Writing

In a persuasive response the writer must take a position and then present reasons that provide convincing support for that position. In order to be convincing, these reasons must be as specific and as detailed as possible, for the specificity and thoroughness with which the writer develops these reasons determine the quality of the elaboration, which in turn directly affects the force of the persuasive argument.

The persuasive prompt in this handbook (see page 44) requires the writer to take a position on whether Texans should limit the use of water in their homes to keep Texas from having water shortages. The following examples of the levels of elaboration have been taken from a response in which the writer has taken a position supporting water limits. (The underlined sections represent additional levels of elaboration.)

UNELABORATED IDEA

Water is necessary for life.

The writer attempts to show the importance of limiting water use by presenting one way in which water is essential (it is "necessary for life"); however, because this idea is neither specific nor developed, it does not provide convincing support for the writer's position.

EXTENDED IDEA

Water is necessary for life. <u>Humans need it, and so do thirsty crops and parched animals.</u>

The extension adds one piece of specific information that defines what the writer means by the word "life" in the unelaborated idea. That is, life includes humans, crops, and animals. Although in this instance the writer creates a second sentence in order to extend the unelaborated idea, extension does not require an increase in the number of sentences. In fact, whether the extension is one sentence or two has no bearing on the effectiveness of the elaboration, since successful elaboration is dependent less on the number of sentences than on the total amount of information presented.

SOMEWHAT ELABORATED IDEA

Water is necessary for life. Humans need it, and so do thirsty crops and parched animals. <u>Without water, the land will dry up, and animals will begin to die.</u>

This somewhat elaborated idea describes the specific conseqences of a water shortage on both land and animals (two of the three components of "life"). That is, without water neither land nor animals will survive ("...the land will dry up, and animals will begin to die"). Because this cause-and-effect relationship is both relevant to the original idea and specific, its addition strengthens the persuasiveness of the writer's argument.

MODERATELY ELABORATED IDEA

> Water is necessary for life. Humans need it, and so do thirsty crops and parched animals. Without water, the land will dry up, and animals will begin to die. Once there are no crops or animals, people will not only have a shortage of food but also of water. They may begin to get sick, and some may even die.

The moderately elaborated idea further extends the cause-and-effect relationship introduced in the model of the somewhat elaborated idea. In addition to pointing out the effect of water shortages on land and animals, this example proceeds one step further. That is, it shows what the effect on human life will be: once there are "no crops or animals," people will have a shortage of food and water, causing them to get sick and perhaps even die. By moderately elaborating on the original idea that "water is necessary for life," the writer has included the level of specific detail needed to provide convincing support for his or her position in this part of the response.

RETHINKING AND CLARIFYING THE DRAFT: THE REVISION STAGE

What is Revision?

Revision can be thought of as a three-part process: asking questions about a piece of writing, exploring alternative ways to express ideas, and deciding what changes to make in the piece. Revision occurs whenever the writer reexamines a piece of writing and makes changes so that the writing better communicates his or her thoughts. The changes made during the revision process may include any elements that make the message more effective. The writer may look at such features as organization, word choice, sentence structure, elaboration, and purpose. The writer may add, delete, substitute, or reorganize material. During this phase of the writing process, the writer focuses on content--what ideas to express and how to express them--leaving the correction of usage and mechanical errors for a later time.

Helping Students to Revise

An assumption sometimes made is that students can look at their writing and know what needs to be improved and what kinds of changes to make. In reality, students need to be shown how to revise. Without experience in revision, they may tend to see their first draft of a piece as a finished product. When given the opportunity to do a second draft, they may merely recopy their first draft more neatly, occasionally making a few mechanical corrections. Students need to be shown revision strategies and to be given frequent opportunities to practice them. Below are several ideas on teaching revision that some teachers have found to be helpful.

Modeling

Modeling revision for students can be very beneficial, particularly in the early stages of writing instruction. It is helpful for them to see examples of the kinds of questions one can ask about a piece of writing and of the kinds of changes that one might make to a piece. One way to model revision is to work with the class on a piece of writing displayed on a chart or transparency. This might be an anonymous piece, a sample of the teacher's own writing, or a paper from the class (but one without too many distracting mechanical errors). By asking students appropriate questions about the piece and getting their input on both the strengths of the writing and the ways in which it might be improved, the teacher is actually providing students with concrete examples that show them how to approach revision in their own writing.

Conferencing

Another way to model revision is to hold a brief revision conference with each student about a piece he or she is working on. Talking to students one-on-one allows the teacher to focus on the specific strengths, needs, and writing difficulties of each student. It also provides an additional opportunity to model revision. While it is important to teach student writers how to improve upon their writing, it may be even more important to teach them to value what they have written. Therefore, an important first step in working with individual students is to identify the strengths of the piece of writing. In addition to the powerful motivational advantage of helping a student to value his or her own writing, emphasizing its strengths helps the writer to see what parts of the writing are most appealing to the reader and should therefore be expanded and emphasized. Once a piece's strengths have been addressed, then possible revisions can be explored. It may be useful, particularly when revising with beginning writers, to focus on only one or two revision issues at a time so that the student does not feel overwhelmed.

One way to address revision in a conference is to ask students questions about their work, which both helps them to focus on areas where the effectiveness of the piece could be improved and gives them examples of the kinds of questions they can ask about their writing when they are working independently. It is important, however, not to overwhelm or discourage the writer by asking too many questions in one conference. Every issue does not need to be addressed in every piece of writing.

Mini-Lessons

Giving students the skills they need to make appropriate changes to their text is a critical component of helping students learn to revise. One way to demonstrate these skills in the context of student writing is to use "mini-lessons"--brief lessons focusing on a specific problem or revision strategy and using sample writing to illustrate the point. For example, a lesson on sentence combining might involve examining the sentences in a piece of writing and having the class find places where combining sentences would enhance the piece. A lesson on elaboration might involve reviewing a piece of writing to show how more specific language would improve the overall effectiveness of the piece. In each case students could then be given the opportunity to apply the same principle to a piece of their own writing.

Peer Revision

One effective way for students to learn to revise is to read (or hear) each other's work. Students can learn a great deal about writing both from giving feedback and from receiving it. However, it is important that students be trained in this process and that they be given specific guidelines, such as questions to ask about a piece of writing (e.g., What did you like most about this piece?), phrases to use (e.g., One place where I needed more information was. . .), a checklist, or some other tool to help focus their attention.

Shared Responsibility

It is important for students to feel a sense of responsibility for their own writing. They are more likely to feel this sense of responsibility when they retain some control over their own work. For example, although the teacher can be a valuable resource during the revision process, it is important for students to make the final decisions about what changes to make to a piece. Furthermore, the more experience students have had in the writing process, the more responsibility they can take for their own revision. Once they have become accustomed to revising their own writing, they can do much of the revision on their own and can provide increasingly useful feedback to their peers as well.

"Marking Up" A Draft

When working with students who have limited experience in the writing process, it may be useful to show them how to go about making changes on a draft. These students may benefit from practical suggestions for managing revision, such as double-spacing on each draft to leave room to write in changes, writing drafts on one side of the paper so that they can cut and paste, crossing out words rather than trying to erase them, and circling words that they want to come back to later. It is particularly important for students to see that marking up a paper is perfectly acceptable and is, in fact, an important component of revision.

Practice

In order to learn how to revise, students must have the opportunity to practice frequently with many different kinds of writing. The more opportunities they have to revise, the more they are likely to internalize the process and apply it to their writing independently.

Questions to Ask About a Piece of Writing

Improving a piece of writing involves asking many different kinds of questions about the piece. Behind the larger question of how the message may be communicated most effectively lie numerous smaller questions pertaining to such issues as purpose, clarity, organization, elaboration, word choice, and sentence structure. Some of the kinds of questions that might be addressed with respect to a piece of writing include the following:

Purpose/Topic/Audience

- What is the topic?
- Has the writer stayed on topic throughout the piece?
- What is the writer's purpose for writing?
- Does every element in the piece contribute to the writer's purpose?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Are the writer's language and tone appropriate for the intended audience?

Organization

- Is there a more effective or logical way to arrange the ideas?
- Are there parts of the piece that are unnecessary?
- Has the writer repeated the same ideas unnecessarily?
- Are there digressions or loose ends?
- Are the connections between and among ideas logical?
- Are transitions clearly marked?
- Is there a beginning, middle, and end?

Elaboration

- Has the writer provided details, illustrations, and/or specific examples to develop his or her ideas?
- Has the writer fully developed his or her ideas
- Is the development of ideas consistent throughout the paper?
- Has the writer included everything the reader needs to know in order to understand the ideas in the piece?
- Are there any ideas in the piece that need clarification?

Language

- Has the writer used words correctly?
- Has the writer used specific, concrete language rather than vague, general language?
- Is each sentence clear and complete?
- Has the writer used a variety of sentence structures?
- Has the writer combined ideas where appropriate to produce more effective sentences?

Questions such as these may provide a useful starting point when working with students to revise a piece of writing. Once students have experience answering other readers' questions about their writing, they can begin to internalize the process, asking these kinds of questions for themselves. To further this process, some students may benefit from the use of a revision checklist. A checklist might consist initially of a small number of questions. The list could then be expanded as students acquire additional revision skills. Such a checklist might include questions like the following:

- Is my purpose for writing clear?
- Is there anything else the reader needs to know?
- Are there any parts of the piece that are confusing?
- Are there parts of the piece I don't really need?
- Are there more precise words I could use?
- Have I used a variety of sentence structures?
- Have I combined sentences where appropriate?
- Have I put my ideas in the best possible order?
- Does my piece have a beginning and an ending?

As students are practicing a particular type of writing, it may be helpful to work with them on revision issues that are of particular importance for that type of writing in addition to the more general issues addressed in the questions above. Some questions that might be examined during revision of a persuasive piece include the following:

- Have I clearly stated my position?
- Have I maintained the same position throughout the paper?
- Have I supported my arguments with specific details, examples, and illustrations?
- Have I fully explained my ideas?
- Does everything in my paper provide support for my position?

Revising for TAAS

The ability to "resee" a piece of writing and to make appropriate changes to it helps the student to communicate more effectively on all kinds of tasks, including responding to a TAAS prompt. Writing for TAAS is different from classroom writing assignments in two important ways. First, the student does all the writing in one session. Second, the student does not have access to outside resources, such as peer feedback, the teacher, a dictionary, or a grammar book. For these reasons the TAAS composition is not considered "polished" writing. However, this is not to say that the TAAS writer should not revise. In order to be successful on the TAAS written composition, the writer needs to organize and develop his or her ideas to accomplish a specific writing purpose, activities that are very much tied to revision. The student who has internalized the writing process will know how to reexamine his or her

composition without any teacher assistance. That student will be able to use revision to increase the effectiveness of the response.

Examples: Revision and TAAS

The writing process for TAAS may take many forms. One student may brainstorm to develop a list of ideas, then rearrange and expand those ideas into a final product. Another may write a rough draft, then mark up that draft extensively before writing a second draft on the lined pages. A third student may do much of the revision work internally, writing just a few notes before moving into a final version.

Following are two annotated examples of some of the many ways a student writer might revise when applying the writing process to a TAAS prompt. These examples are based on the prompt on page 44 of this handbook. Each example represents a small portion of an entire piece of writing and includes a first draft, revisions, and a final version.

Example A

EXCERPT FROM FIRST DRAFT

I think we shouldn't limit use
there are many times
Another reason is that water is
necessary ~~a necessity~~. People would have a
(Health diseases)
lot of problems if they couldn't do
some things when they needed to, like
taking showers and washing dishes.
I realize that some
There are many unnecessary uses of
are NOT absolutely essential
water too, like filling swimming
pools. *

* But I think that, overall, there are
mores uses of water that are
necessary than unnecessary.

Example A

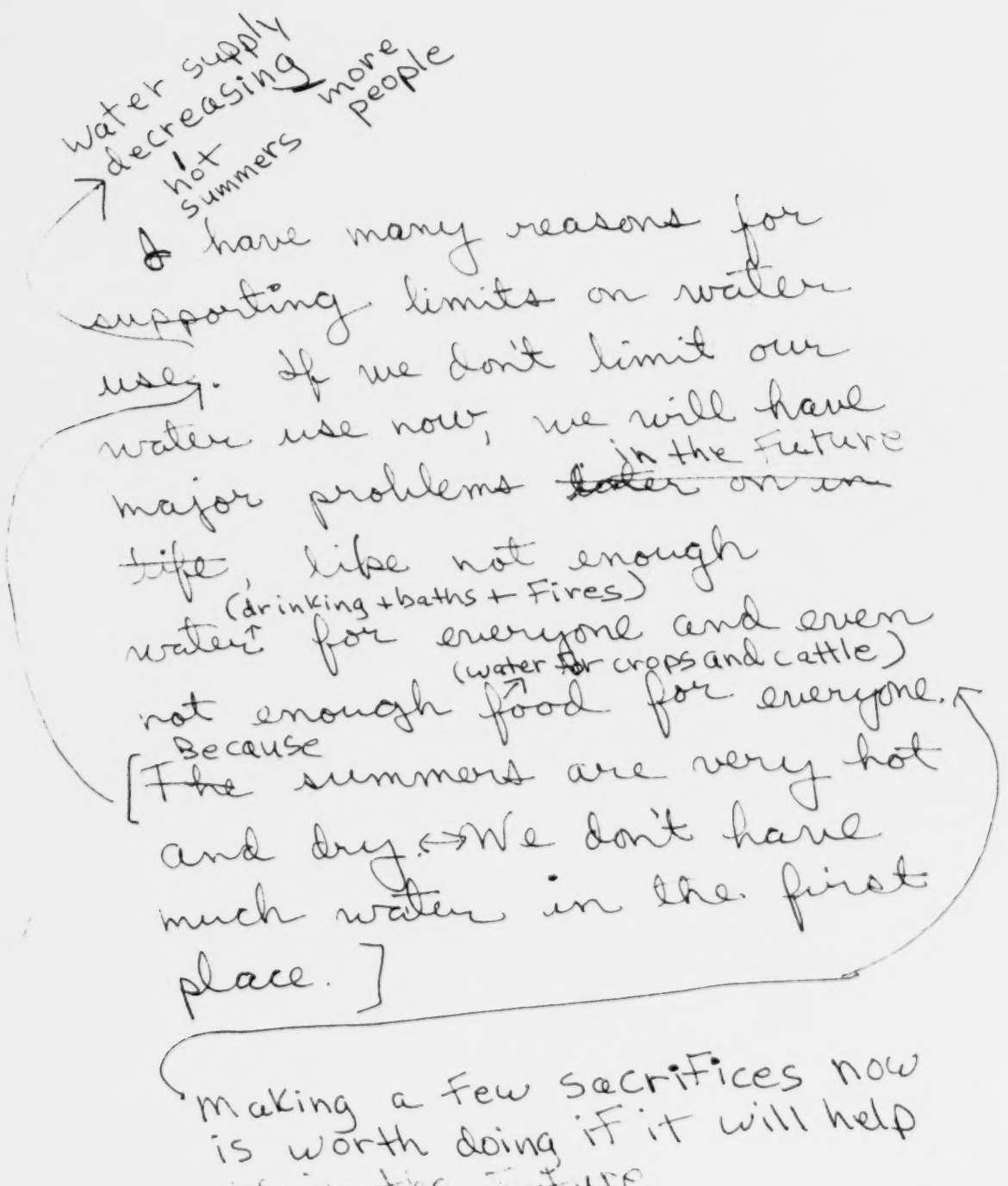
EXCERPT FROM FINAL DRAFT

> Another reason I think we shouldn't limit the use of water is that there are many times when using water is necessary. For example, people have to take showers and they have to wash their dishes. If we didn't keep our bodies and our eating utensils clean, our health would suffer because we would get more diseases. I realize that some uses of water are not absolutely essential, like filling swimming pools. But I think that, overall, there are more uses of water that are necessary than unnecessary.

This writer began with an idea that was not only minimally developed but also included information that did not contribute to his or her persuasive argument. He or she then made a number of changes to the paragraph that resulted in a more effective persuasive argument. The writer revised the first sentence ("Another reason is that water is a necessity") in two ways. First, he or she clarified "Another reason" by specifying "Another reason I think we shouldn't limit the use of water." He or she then reworded the rather vague idea contained in the second half of the sentence ("water is a necessity") by specifying in what way water is a necessity--that is, that there are many times when using water is necessary. The second sentence, which began with a general statement that "People would have a lot of problems if they couldn't do some things when they needed to," was expanded; the author explained what kinds of problems would develop if people couldn't take showers or wash dishes. In the last sentence of the first version, the writer mentioned an unnecessary use of water, which detracted from his or her argument that water use should not be limited because of the necessary uses of water. In the revised version, however, the writer weaves this point into his or her overall argument by acknowledging that there are some unnecessary uses, but countering that there are more necessary uses than unnecessary uses. In this way, the author refutes the other side, creating additional support for his or her position. Overall, the revised version of this paragraph is much more persuasive than the first version.

Example B

EXCERPT FROM FIRST DRAFT


water supply decreasing
more people
hot summers
I have many reasons for supporting limits on water use. If we don't limit our water use now, we will have major problems in the future like not enough water (drinking + baths + Fires) for everyone and even not enough food (water for crops and cattle) for everyone. Because The summers are very hot and dry. We don't have much water in the first place.
making a few sacrifices now is worth doing if it will help us in the future

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Example B

EXCERPT FROM FINAL DRAFT

> I have many reasons for supporting limits on water use. Our water supply is decreasing every year for several reasons. Because the summers are very hot and dry, we don't have much water in the first place. More and more people are moving to Texas, so the amount of water per person is getting lower and lower. We have to take action soon! If we don't limit our water use now, we will have major problems in the future. There won't be enough water to go around, which means that people won't be able to use water when they really need it, like for drinking, bathing, and putting out fires. There also won't be enough water for crops and for cattle, which means that our food supply will be seriously affected. Making a few sacrifices now is worth doing, isn't it, if it will help us in the future?

This writer made a number of changes between the first and the second draft. First, he or she reorganized the two primary ideas of the paragraph--that we have an increasingly limited water supply and that the lack of water will have serious consequences. Placing the sources of the shortage before the consequences of a shortage created a more logical flow of ideas, one that is easier for the reader to follow. Second, the writer expanded each idea, explaining in greater detail in the second version why we face the possibility of a water shortage and what the consequences might be. For example, in the revised version, rather than merely stating that there will be less food and leaving the reader to make the connection between water use and food, he or she explained how a water shortage will affect the food supply. Third, the writer combined two ideas (hot and dry summers; low supply of water) in order to more effectively express the causal relationship between them ("Because the summers are very hot and dry, we don't have much water in the first place"). Finally, he or she added a concluding sentence that helps to tie together the ideas presented in the paragraph and adds to the persuasive tone of the piece.

"CLEANING UP" THE DRAFT: THE EDITING STAGE

What is Editing?

Once the writer has generated ideas, developed them into a draft, and revised the piece for content and organization, he or she is ready to address the grammatical and mechanical errors in a piece. In this handbook this stage of the writing process is referred to as the editing stage. The term "editing" is used to refer to all of the activities and strategies that the writer uses to remove errors from a piece of writing. The word "proofreading," often used synonymously with editing, is used in this handbook to refer to the final reading of a piece, during which the writer makes a final check for remaining errors.

Addressing error correction only after the writer feels satisfied with the content and organization of a piece can be particularly beneficial for student writers. If the writer becomes overly concerned about errors in the early stages of writing a piece, he or she may be distracted from the task of deciding what to say and how to say it. In addition, he or she may be less apt to take compositional risks and more likely to focus on whether or not each word or sentence is "right." On the other hand, if the writer knows that errors will be addressed in the final stages of writing a piece, he or she is free to concentrate on the effective communication of ideas during the early stages of writing.

Helping Students to Edit

To say that correcting errors might best be done in the later stages of writing is not to say that editing is not an essential component of the writing process. Errors interfere with communication by impeding the reader's ability to understand the ideas the writer is trying to communicate. Therefore, it is important for the writer to learn how to identify and correct errors before considering a piece finished.

Helping student writers to edit their work involves many of the same strategies as helping them to revise. For example, it may be particularly helpful to model editing, to provide frequent opportunities for practice, and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own editing.

Editing Strategies

Editing can be approached in many different ways. Following are a number of ideas that some teachers have used effectively to manage editing in the classroom.

- Cultivate a healthy attitude toward errors

It is important for student writers to understand that correcting errors is an integral part of the writing process. Unless they understand that all writers make mistakes, they may become discouraged at the presence of errors in their own writing and may erroneously conclude that they are poor writers.

- Hold editing conferences

The editing conference focuses specifically on error removal and mechanical skills rather than on content or organization. Like the revision conference, the editing conference should begin with identification of strengths and successes. When working individually with students, it may be beneficial to address one or two types of errors at a time. Concentrating on one or two skill areas at a time allows the student to master and internalize those skills more readily than if he or she tries to absorb a wide range of mechanics and usage rules all at once.

- Have the student read a piece several times for different purposes

One technique that may help students find errors is to read through a piece several times, focusing each time on a different kind of error. The student might, for example, check the spelling in a piece in one reading and the capitalization in the next.

- Have the student check the piece against a checklist

This may be an individual checklist developed for each student and attached to his or her writing folder. It may also be a larger, more generic chart used by all students. The checklist, whether for an individual or a group, may be modified as students acquire additional skills.

- Have the student identify possible misspellings on early drafts

When a student is not sure of the spelling of words, circling or underlining them immediately has several advantages. If the student writes the word incorrectly several times during drafting, the word may begin to look acceptable, and the student may forget his or her initial uncertainty about the spelling. By marking problem words early on, the student acquires the habit of identifying words that need to be checked. In addition, this allows the student to continue to write without being distracted by concerns about possible spelling errors.

- Have the student read backwards for spelling errors

One technique to help student writers find spelling errors they might overlook in a quick reading is to have them read the paper backwards, checking one word at a time for spelling errors.

- Have the student keep a list of frequently misspelled words

Another technique to help students minimize spelling errors is to have each student keep a list of words that he or she frequently misspells and, during the editing process, check each piece of writing to be edited against that list.

- Use peer editing

Peer editing can be a valuable source of feedback for student writers when those giving feedback are given specific guidelines to follow. One way to manage peer editing is to use an editing circle, in which a paper is passed around a small group with each member looking at the paper for a different type of error. Another way to structure peer editing is to have several stronger students function as an editing team that the other students can use as a resource for editing problems.

- Create an editing table

One way to manage the editing phase is to have an editing table where students may go to use dictionaries and other resources necessary for successful editing. An editing team might sit at this table as well.

- Have the student proofread the final draft before turning it in

After applying various editing strategies, the student may want to do a final proofreading to check for any remaining errors. Reading the piece aloud may be particularly useful during this stage. If the student has recopied a piece, he or she may want to compare the recopied version word-for-word with the previous version.

- Act as the final editor

One of the most important goals of writing instruction is to teach students to internalize the writing process so that they can apply it independently. One way to help students internalize the editing process is to have them do their own edits before bringing a piece to the teacher for editing. This encourages students to take responsibility for their own editing rather than relying on the teacher to find and correct their mistakes.

- Spare the red pen

In order to encourage student writers to take compositional risks, it is critical to reinforce risk-taking. One way to do this is to be very sparing in marking up

a paper, particularly in correcting errors. Marking all of the errors on a paper can both discourage and overwhelm students. One alternative to circling all of the errors on a piece is to record on a separate note card the kinds of errors made, limiting comments made on the piece itself to one or two types of errors. The note cards themselves can then serve as a resource for the teacher in planning instruction and future editing conferences.

- Publish student writing

"Publishing" selected pieces of writing may make it easier for students to see their writing as a way to communicate a message and may also provide them with a motivation for finding and correcting errors. Publication of a piece may be accomplished in any number of ways, such as creating a "book" that contains a piece of writing from everyone in the class.

Helping Students to Master Mechanical Skills

An important part of learning to edit for errors is learning correct usage and mechanics. Students must first master these language skills before they can successfully edit for errors in their own writing. Some of the kinds of skills that might be addressed in the classroom include the following:

- Punctuation
- Capitalization
- Spelling
- Pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Subject-verb agreement
- Correct usage of verb tense
- Correct usage of pronouns
- Correct usage of adjectives and adverbs
- Correct usage of negatives
- Correct usage of homonyms
- Sentence structure

Below are some specific strategies that teachers might use to help students improve their skills in language usage and mechanics.

- Teach skills in the context of student writing

Many teachers have reported that usage and mechanics are best learned when taught in the context of student writing rather than in isolation through drills and exercises. When students apply their knowledge of a skill to their own writing, they often develop a "feel" for the skill that students learning through worksheets do not seem to acquire as readily.

- Teach skills through mini-lessons

One way to teach skills in the context of student writing is to begin with a mini-lesson on a specific skill, illustrating the skill through a piece of writing. Students can then work in small groups on a specific task related to that skill. For example, the teacher might present a lesson on subject-verb agreement by having groups look at subject-verb agreement in a piece of writing. Each student might then be asked to examine the subject-verb agreement in a piece of his or her own writing.

- Reinforce skill acquisition through writing

Once a skill has been presented, it can be reinforced by having students focus on that skill in a particular piece of writing, by having them add it to the editing checklist, or, for students who are having particular difficulties, by conferencing with them on that skill.

- Address skills as particular needs arise

An important issue in language instruction is determining the order in which to address specific skills. One approach to this issue is to examine student writing and to present those skills that are posing particular problems for students. For example, if a number of students are writing short, choppy sentences rather than combining sentences, where appropriate, to create more effective structures, a presentation on sentence combining would be useful.

- Have students write often

One of the most effective ways for students to learn language skills is to write often. The more practice students have writing, revising, and editing, the better their language skills will likely become.

- Have students read frequently

Students learn writing skills through reading as well as through writing. Having frequent opportunities to read allows students to see how other writers use language and mechanics. Once students see the connection between reading and writing, they will be able to approach reading from the point of view of a writer and will become increasingly aware of ways in which other writers use language.

Editing and the TAAS Composition

Because the TAAS composition is written in one sitting and is not considered "polished" writing, editing is less critical on the TAAS written composition than are some other aspects of the writing process. However, students who have learned to edit their own work will be able to scrutinize their compositions

and identify and correct many of the errors. While they cannot check their spelling in a dictionary, they can look over punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, and usage, applying the language skills they have acquired. In addition, they can proofread for careless errors.

Editing/Proofreading and the Multiple-Choice Portion of TAAS

Students are asked to apply editing and proofreading skills on the multiple-choice portion of the TAAS test. This portion of the test assesses students' mastery of the conventions of standard English, as well as their ability to edit and proofread. Because these skills are assessed in the context of reading a passage and correcting the errors it contains, the best preparation for the multiple-choice section of the TAAS writing test is to teach students to find and correct the errors in their own or a peer's writing.

Three skill areas are assessed in the multiple-choice portion of the TAAS writing test: sentence structure, usage, and language mechanics. These skill areas correspond to Objectives 5, 6, and 7 of the *TAAS English Language Arts Writing Objectives and Measurement Specifications.*

Sentence Structure

Objective 5: The student will recognize appropriate sentence construction within the context of a written passage.

At the exit level, items for this objective will assess the following instructional targets:

- Recognize complete sentences and avoid fragments and run-ons
- Combine sentence parts and sentences to produce a variety of sentence structures including simple, compound, and complex

These skills are tested in the context of a written passage that may contain fragments, run-ons, sentences that need to be combined, and correctly formed sentences. The student must choose the best sentence structure for each underlined portion of the passage, making the same kinds of decisions that he or she makes when looking at sentence structure in his or her own writing.

Usage

Objective 6: The student will recognize appropriate English usage within the context of a written passage.

At the exit level, items for this objective will assess the following instructional targets:

- Use common affixes to change words from one part of speech to another
- Use correct subject-verb agreement with nouns, personal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, and compound subjects, and use correct pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Recognize correct verb tense and correct form of tense of irregular verbs, and avoid faulty shifts in tense
- Use the appropriate forms of adjectives and adverbs and the correct case of pronouns, and avoid the use of double negatives

These skills are also tested in the context of a written passage. The passage contains numbered blanks. For each blank the student must decide which of four choices would correctly complete the sentence. Again, this activity represents the kind of decision-making in which students engage when editing their own writing.

Mechanics

Objective 7: The student will recognize appropriate spelling, capitalization, and punctuation within the context of a written passage.

At the exit level, items for this objective will assess the following instructional targets:

- Use the fundamentals of spelling
- Use appropriate capitalization
- Use the fundamentals of punctuation

This objective, like Objective 5, assesses the student's ability to look at a piece of writing and to identify errors in the piece. The student reads a brief passage containing several underlined sections, each of which may or may not have an error in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation. For each underlined section the student must decide whether an error exists and, if so, which kind of error it is. This objective assesses the student's ability to apply proofreading skills to a piece of writing. As with the other sections of the multiple-choice portion of the test, the more experience a student has editing and proofreading pieces of writing, the better he or she will likely perform on test items.

Part 2

TAAS Exit Level Scoring Guide and Sample Student Responses

PERSUASIVE

Water is becoming scarcer in Texas because of hot summers and a growing population. To keep Texas from having water shortages, some people believe that Texans should limit the use of water in their homes. What is your position concerning this issue? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position and supporting it with convincing reasons.

SCORE POINT 0

0 = RESPONSES THAT ARE NOT SCORABLE BECAUSE THEY ARE BLANK OR FAIL IN OTHER WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE TASK. THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF RESPONSES FALL INTO THE "0" CATEGORY:

- ***Responses in which the student writes on an entirely different topic than the one specified.***

- ***Responses in which the student makes an attempt to respond, but this attempt contains so little writing that the reader cannot discern whether the student is responding to the prompt.***

- ***Responses in which the student repeats or paraphrases the prompt but does not attempt to respond to it.***

- ***Responses in which the student writes entirely in a language other than English.***

- ***Responses that are completely unreadable because they are illegible or incoherent.*** Illegible responses are those in which the handwriting cannot be read; letters may be discernible, but they do not form recognizable words. Incoherent responses are those in which letters or words are strung together in a meaningless fashion.

- ***Responses that contain nothing more than an explicit refusal to respond to the specified prompt, although the student may offer some explanation of his or her refusal.***

- ***Blank papers.***

SCORE POINT 1

1 = RESPONSES THAT ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS THE TASK BUT ARE NOT SUCCESSFUL. THE FOLLOWING KINDS OF RESPONSES FALL INTO THE "1" CATEGORY:

- ***Responses that use the wrong purpose; i.e., they do not include the requisite components of persuasive writing.*** Some of these responses are not persuasive in their presentation. In other responses the writer gives information that does not support the stated position.

- ***Responses that are persuasive but are unsuccessful in their presentation.*** Responses that attempt to address the task but are not successful may take the following forms:

  - Responses that present a brief phrase with some indication of an attempt to attend to the task.

  - Responses that address the topic in a skeletal way. These responses may present a position along with one or more reasons, and there may even be a little elaboration of these reasons, but the information and explanation are insufficient to provide a minimally sound case in support of the position chosen.

  - Responses in which the reader must infer the relationship between the information presented and the point that the information is intended to clarify.

  - Responses that attend very briefly to the task but do not remain on topic. These responses acknowledge the assignment but then switch to another topic.

- ***Responses that are poorly organized.*** Some of these responses are so poorly organized that the reader is confused and has difficulty following the writer's argument. In other responses the writer may ramble, presenting numerous details that do not enhance the argument.

- ***Responses that exhibit an overall lack of control of written language so that communication is impaired.*** The expression of the writer's thoughts is so confusing that the reader is left wondering what the writer is attempting to say.

  - At the word level there may be repeated errors in the spelling of basic words, in word choice, and/or in usage.

  - At the sentence level confusion occurs when words are not arranged in a logical order, or when there is an apparent order but the meaning is nevertheless unclear. It is inappropriate for the reader to guess at the writer's intent or to make inferences about the writer's meaning.

  - At the composition level responses lack explicit connections between ideas, and attempts at illustrations or explanations of ideas are either irrelevant or repetitious.

TAAS **Texas Assessment of Academic Skills**
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear editor,

I'm concerned about how our water is becoming scarcer in Texas. I feel that we shouldn't waste as much as our water as we have been doing. There are many ways we could conserve our water but it takes cooperation from all of the Texans. We as Texans should conserve our water by watering our yards for shorter times, don't leave the water running when washing cars, make sure all faucets are turned off completely, and take shorter showers. There are many ways we can work with this problem, but if we don't cure soon, our water is going to get more scarcer and our population is going to grow tremendously. I'm willing to do all I can concerning this issue, because we do not need a water shortage in Texas. I would love it if you kept me informed on what's happening with this issue. Thanks for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

This writer attempts to persuade the reader to support water conservation but fails to provide enough specific information to create a successful convincing argument in support of his or her position. Although the writer does make some specific suggestions for implementing water conservation (e.g., "...watering our yards for shorter times, don't leave the water running when washing cars..."), most of the response consists of general statements in favor of limiting water use (e.g., "I'm willing to do all I can concerning this issue, because we do not need a water shortage in Texas"). To achieve a higher score, this writer would need to provide additional reasons in support of water conservation and to develop those reasons with the kind of specificity that he or she uses in suggesting ways to conserve water. For example, he or she could discuss some of the factors that contribute to water shortages in Texas and/or some of the negative consequences that a water shortage would produce. This writer would benefit from additional experience using prewriting to generate and develop ideas.

SCORE POINT 1

STOP

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Today living in a world who very much problems and conflits, in where are very much waste. My concerning on the issue of watey. My position concerning that water the state; not me. I mean I want water is bad wastting.

The peoples waste water dont thik the other peoples needing watey. Also is childrens and old mens and old womans and young peoples need water so we have respect to the old peoples when that need water or is sick.

We needing programs watey. Is very bad admosfer and series problems for our future. Is good make limites in everybody for water everybody using very ~~too~~ too much and no more. The peoples say the childrens is the future.

Thats my idea about wate with the peoples and the water.

This writer attempts to state a position on the issue of water rationing ("My position concerning that water the state; not me") and to defend it ("Is very bad admosfer and series problems for our future..."). However, meaning is impaired by the word choice and the confusing arrangement of words within sentences (e.g., "We needing programs water," "everybody using very too much and no more"). To achieve a higher score and to communicate effectively, this writer would need to develop a greater degree of language control. The writer would benefit from continued language instruction and frequent opportunities for writing practice.

SCORE POINT 1

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

49

To the editor,

I am writing you because I think the problem of water scarcity in our state, as well as our local communities, is becoming increasingly important. I believe it is time that this issue be addressed, not only by the community but by the state. So I am for limiting water.

Many people in the communities across the state of Texas depend on water for business functions as well as basic needs. I believe it is the state's job to look to the future and act upon it now so that the people of Texas can live with the limits of water supplies now rather than none tomorrow.

Some people think since they pay taxes, they should have the freedom to use as much water as they want. For example, one person might need more water than another person. I support the idea of limiting water. We must decide the future of Texas and its people now before it is too late.

A concerned citizen

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

This response contains two general reasons in support of limiting water ("the problem of water scarcity...is becoming increasingly important" and "Many people...depend on water for business functions as well as basic needs"). However, the writer fails to elaborate on these ideas and, as a result, does not present a convincing argument in support of his or her position. In addition, the writer further detracts from the effectiveness of the response by presenting arguments in support of the other side of the issue ("Some people...than another person") without refuting those arguments. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to provide additional relevant and specific information about the existing reasons or generate other developed ideas in support of his or her position. This writer would benefit from additional instruction in the use of elaboration to develop a convincing persuasive argument as well as from opportunities to apply elaboration techniques to his or her own writing.

SCORE POINT 1

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Sir,

I'm writing to tell you, I'm very concern about water becoming scarcer in Texas.

The texans needs to work together to prevent the water becoming scarce by limiting the water in their homes or use water wisely.

Some people take water for granted People think water is going to be there forever.

Even water is not as valuable as diamond but it is valuable when there is not enough water. Water plays an important ROle in our lives & nature. If there is not enough water to give to

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

the cattle, then the cattle dies.

So it's going to cost us alot.

So thank you for reading my letter.

This writer takes a position on water conservation ("The texans needs to work together to prevent the water becoming scarce by limiting the water in their homes or use water wisely") but provides very little support for that position. The reasons that he or she presents are either too general to constitute effective support for the position (e.g., "Water plays an important role in our lives & nature") or too vague to be clearly understood by the reader (e.g., "Even water is not as valuable as diamond but it is valuable when there is not enough water"). To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to give the reader additional information in order to make these reasons clearer and more persuasive. For example, he or she could give concrete examples of ways in which water plays an important role in our lives and could also provide further explanation to clarify the statement that water "...is valuable when there is not enough water". This writer would benefit from practice in the use of revision to develop his or her ideas as well as from additional experience writing for a persuasive purpose.

SCORE POINT 1

STOP

Dear Editor:

I am concerned about the water shortage problem in Texas, and would like to share of the ideas I've heard regarding this subject of our water loss. I think conserving water in our homes is a good idea.

First, some people like to just waste it, like when they use it to play outside, or when there watering the grass and leave the water on all day. People should be more concerned about it.

On the other hand it's really hard to conserve because some people need to use a lot of water at home. They need to wash their cars, and people with children need to wash clothes sometimes every day. Also, people are supposed to drink eight glasses of water a day and that adds up to a lot of water.

But people have really taken water for granted. They don't realize that water plays a big role in our world. People should be more concerned about the water problem and do their part to help.

For these reasons I am for conserving water.

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully yours,

Although the writer states a position ("I think conserving water in our homes is a good idea") and provides some support for it (in the second and fourth paragraphs), the response as a whole is not persuasive. To be persuasive, the writer would need to take a single position and support it with convincing reasons. In this response the writer is clearly in favor of water conservation; however, he or she presents a greater amount of evidence in support of the opposing side than in support of this stated position. For example, in paragraph two the writer supports water conservation through several specific examples of how people waste water at home; but in paragraph three, he or she focuses on the difficulties of water conservation by specifically outlining the ways in which people need to use water at home. Because the evidence in paragraph three, which delineates the difficulties of water conservation, is greater than the total amount of evidence supporting water conservation, this paragraph is detrimental to the writer's argument and the overall persuasiveness of the response. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to delete any material that does not provide direct support for his or her position and generate some additional relevant and specific information in support of his or her position. This writer would benefit from additional instruction in the components of effective persuasive writing as well as from frequent opportunities to write sustained persuasive compositions.

SCORE POINT 1

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

I am concerned with the water shortage or scarcity of water in Texas. There are many steps that can be taken to help the problem.

One step that can be taken is that each area have certain days each week he/she can water your lawn, wash her/his car, and fill a swimming pool. Texans waste alot of water lawns and other things, they need to be done but the amount of water needs to be regulated.

Another step that can be taken is mix lake water and well water to make the well water last much longer. Texans could recycle sewage water like a lot of states are now doing to make water go alot further. Texans could also use rain water by catching it in big tanks, recycling, and distributing it just like normal, clean water.

Final step that can be taken, that I know of, is the water companies should monitor the water better. The water companies should talk to people about saving water. This could save alot of water, such as taken shorter showers, don't get more to drink than what you want, etc....

I hope my idea's can help in many ways to stop water scarcity in Texas.

Signed,
A concerned Citizen

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

GO ON

This writer does demonstrate the ability to elaborate and organize ideas; however, the response is unsuccessful because it does not include the requisite components of persuasive writing. Rather than taking a position on mandatory water conservation and supporting the position with specific, elaborated reasons, the writer presents a "how-to" paper on how to solve the water shortage problem. He or she merely offers possible solutions to the water shortage problem and does not establish a connection between these solutions and the issue of water conservation. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to take a position on mandatory water conservation and to support that position with specific information. The writer might, for example, use information presented in the third paragraph of the response to support a position against water conservation. He or she could argue that water conservation is unnecessary because there are other, more effective ways to deal with water shortage (e.g., "Texans could recycle sewage water like a lot of states are now doing to make water go a lot further"). This writer would benefit from additional instruction in the components of effective persuasive writing as well as from opportunities to practice persuasive writing.

SCORE POINT 1

TAAS **Texas Assessment of Academic Skills**
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor

I'm a concerned citizen, I am writing this letter to give my opinion about the important issue of water. I believe people should know about this issue so we can work together on it in the future.

I am for limiting water because water is wasted in many ways. Water can be wasted while someone is brushing their teeth or doing the dishes. It's a fact that a bath uses almost twice as much water as a shower, but the largest waste of water that I have personally seen is our City Water Department. Last week a water main in my neighborhood broke and it took at least 3 hours before someone showed up to fix it. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many gallons of water that wasted.

I am against limiting water because it could be unfair to large families. The size of the family has a great deal to do with how much water is used in each home. The larger the family the more water needed. A large family has to wash more clothes, takes more showers and cook more food. For example there are five kids in my family and my two older brothers are out of high school and work different hours. Because

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

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of the food needs to be cooked several times instead of just once. Since there are 7 people in my family, we would probably have trouble limiting water.

In conclusion it is my suggestion that you, as the editor of our paper, print an article displaying some advantages and disadvantages of limiting the use of water in our homes.

Thank You,

Because the exit level prompt gives the writer wide latitude in the type of position that may be taken, the writer may take a neutral position on the issue addressed in the prompt, such as "I can see advantages of both sides" or "I think there are both advantages and disadvantages to limiting water use." However, if the student does take a neutral position, this position must be explicitly stated. When the student merely lists advantages and disadvantages without using these ideas to support a stated "fence-sitting" position, the response becomes classificatory rather than persuasive. Although this writer demonstrated the ability to develop his or ideas, the response is unsuccessful because the writer gave arguments both <u>for</u> and <u>against</u> limiting water use without tying this information to a position. In order to achieve a higher score, this writer would need to state his or her position on mandatory water conservation and to use the information presented in the response to support that position.

SCORE POINT 1

SCORE POINT 2

2 = RESPONSES THAT ARE MINIMALLY SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS AT ADDRESSING THE PERSUASIVE TASK. THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF RESPONSES FALL INTO THE "2" CATEGORY:

- ***Responses that contain a minimally sufficient amount of evidence in support of the writer's stated position.*** These responses may take the following forms:
  - Responses that present a lengthy set of unelaborated reasons, some of which are specific, in support of the writer's stated position.
  - Responses that present a number of reasons, most of which are extended, in support of the writer's stated position.
  - Responses that present a few reasons in support of the writer's stated position, at least one of which is somewhat elaborated.
  - Responses that present one moderately elaborated reason in support of the writer's stated position.

- ***Responses in which an organizational strategy is apparent, although gaps, rambling, and/or repetition may occur.*** These responses contain inconsistencies in organization that disrupt the logical progression but do not cause confusion.

- ***Responses that exhibit a limited control of written language.*** These responses may contain awkward, simple, or convoluted sentence structures; also, word choice may be limited. In addition, some errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and/or usage may occur, since these responses do not represent "polished" pieces of writing.

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

I think we should limit the use of water in our homes. The hot sun can dry creek, rivers, and streams. Which are essential to farmers and to use as well. With the population growth the more people we have the faster the water will go. If there is a water shortage people (poor & unfortunate) would probably die of thrist. Also, we would not be able to bath ourselves and use the toilet. We would not be able to cook alot of the foods that require water. If we do not limit our water use now. Water is a very important factor in our daily lives but half of the water we use is absolutly unnessecessary. If we do not limit our water supply now, we will be in a major water crisis.

Sincerely;

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

GO ON

This response is sufficiently elaborated to be considered minimally successful. The writer offers three reasons in support of limiting the use of water in the home. Although the first reason ("The hot sun can dry creek, rivers, and streams") is merely extended ("Which are essential to farmers and to use as well"), the writer develops the second reason (population growth causing a water shortage) by giving several specific examples of the negative consequences of water shortage (e.g., "If there is a water shortage people [poor & unfortunate] would probably die of thrist"). The writer briefly mentions a third reason ("...half of the water we use is absolutely unnessecessary") but fails to provide information or examples to support it. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to provide additional support for his or her position either through further development of the existing reasons or through the addition of other relevant and developed reasons. He or she could, for example, elaborate on the first reason by describing some of the ways in which water sources are essential to farmers and other people.

SCORE POINT 2

STOP

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor

I do not believe that we as Texans should have to limit our water supply. The earth is overly abundant with water and with our modern technology we should be able to come up with some way of transporting that water. With all of the rain the world gets as a whole, we shouldn't have a problem with the oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers drying out over the years. If people were limited to a water supply, how could they cook, bath, wash clothes, have anything to drink. I also believe that if the water was a limited supply that people would complain that they had gotten too little water, and that they wanted more. This could cause sore feelings between the government and the people which could lead to state wide problems. Over all I believe it would be best to find a way to make use of all the water in the oceans, seas, & other sources before limiting our supply. I think it would keep the citizens of Texas and the officials happy.

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

GO ON

This response contains a number of reasons for opposing limits on the water supply. Although each of these reasons supports the writer's position, the amount and quality of elaboration varies from reason to reason. Two of the reasons are unelaborated but specific (e.g., "...how could [people] cook, bath, wash clothes, have anything to drink"), whereas the last reason ("...people would complain that they had gotten too little water, and that they wanted more") is elaborated but general. The writer develops this last reason by showing two possible effects of complaints about a limited water supply: they "could cause sore feelings between the government and the people" and this "could lead to state wide problems." However, because the writer never specifies what these "sore feelings" or "state wide problems" would be, the elaboration remains general and somewhat ineffective. The response is strengthened by a consistent organizational strategy; although written as one paragraph, the response includes explicit introductory and concluding sentences between which the writer progresses systematically. To increase the effectiveness of this argument and to achieve a higher score, the writer would need to further develop some of the ideas in the response by providing additional specific details. For example, in the first reason the writer makes a general statement that modern technology should enable us to transport the earth's abundant water supply. He or she might effectively develop this idea by providing specific examples of modern technology that could be used to transport water.

SCORE POINT 2

STOP

TAAS **Texas Assessment of Academic Skills**
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

I believe that Texans should limit the use of water in their homes for several reasons. The first reason is that this would help conserve water. If everyone tries to cut back on using water then there really wouldn't even be a problem to worry about. The second reason that I believe Texans should limit the amount of water they use is that sometimes people end up wasting water. A lot of the time people leave water running that they aren't even using. If Texans are told to limit the amount of water that they use, then they will definitly be more careful about not using water wastefully. The third reason that Texans should limit their use of water is that water isn't really a necesity. It is possible for people to get by without using a whole lot of water. Most people do not really need all of the water that they use. We can all get by without drinking from the faucet every day and without taking showers that last up to twenty minutes. For these reasons that I have just mentioned, I believe that it is imperitive for Texans to reduce the amount of water that they use.

Sincerely,
A concerned citizen

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE

GO ON

In this response the writer presents one extended reason (...this would help conserve water") and two somewhat elaborated reasons ("sometimes people end up wasting water" and "water isn't really a necesity") in support of limiting the use of water in the home. The somewhat elaborated reasons contain enough specific supporting information to be minimally successful. For example, after clarifying the third reason by explaining that "Most people do not really need all of the water that they use," the writer elaborates by giving two specific examples of ways in which people regularly use more water than they need ("We can all get by without drinking from the faucet every day and without taking showers that last up to twenty minutes"). In addition, the writer remains focused on the issue throughout the response and includes no irrelevant or extraneous material. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to provide additional specific information in support of water conservation either by expanding the reasons currently in the response or by including other arguments for water conservation.

SCORE POINT 2

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

To who it may concern,

I am writing you to state my opinion of the water shortage in Texas. I believe that with the hot summers and growing population we can not afford to use so much water as we have been.

If we continue to waste our water use will eventually have a very serious problem on our hands. It may not seem important now but when it happens people will realize how precious water is.

If we continue to neglect our water supply our state could be seriously effected. We could suffer from droughts and famines which could kill up to millions of people. Children would not have the food they need to grow stronger and healthier and the adults will not be able to help themselves much less the children.

If we continue to waste water Texas could become the United States "Ethiopia". We would be in a very serious crisis which I believe most Texans are taking to lightly.

Sincerely,

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

This response contains one general reason and one moderately elaborated reason in support of limiting the use of water. The first reason is merely a prediction of a "very serious problem" if the wasting of water continues. The writer attempts to extend this idea but does so only generally ("It may not seem important now but when it happens people will realize how precious water is"). The second reason, however, is more specific; here the writer has effectively used a cause-and-effect strategy to show possible results of neglecting the water supply, claiming that it would create "droughts and famines" which could in turn "kill up to millions of people." He or she then goes on to explain how the droughts and famines would kill people ("Children would not have the food they need...adults will not be able to help themselves much less the children"). To achieve a higher score, this writer would need to provide enough additional support to create a convincing argument for water conservation. One way to do this would be to develop more fully the discussion of droughts and famine. The writer could, for example, explain how a shortage of water would produce droughts and famine. Another way to develop a convincing argument would be to give one or more additional reasons for supporting limits on water usage and to develop these reasons with specific information and/or examples.

SCORE POINT 2

SCORE POINT 3

3 = RESPONSES THAT REPRESENT GOOD ATTEMPTS AT ADDRESSING THE PERSUASIVE TASK BY TAKING A POSITION AND SUPPORTING THAT POSITION WITH REASON(S). IDEAS ARE GENERALLY WELL ORGANIZED AND ARE SUFFICIENTLY CLEAR SO THAT THE READER HAS NO DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE WRITER IS ATTEMPTING TO SAY. THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF RESPONSES FALL INTO THE "3" CATEGORY:

- ***Responses that present a moderate amount of evidence in support of the writer's stated position.*** These responses may take the following forms:
  - Responses that present a lengthy set of reasons, one of which is moderately elaborated or several of which are somewhat elaborated, in support of the writer's stated position.
  - Responses that present a number of reasons, most of which are somewhat elaborated, in support of the writer's stated position.
  - Responses that present two or more moderately elaborated reasons in support of the writer's stated position.
  - Responses that present one fully elaborated reason--i.e., a reason elaborated sufficiently to be clearly understood and convincing--in support of the writer's stated position.
- ***Responses that have an organizational strategy that is, for the most part, consistent.*** Minor gaps, repetition, or digressions may occur.
- ***Responses that exhibit a clarity of expression, effective word choice, transitions between ideas, and a general control of the written language.*** Some errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and/or usage may occur.

TAAS **Texas Assessment of Academic Skills**
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

Water is becoming scarcer in Texas because of hot summers and a growing population. If we do not try to conserve our water supplies many things can happen. First, we will not have any water for our necessary things. Second, people can die by dehydration because of lack of water. Most important, we will not have any water to give to animals, trees, and crops. This is where we get our oxygen and food supplies.

First, we should try to conserve water so we can use it for necessary things. Imagine taking a shower and the water cuts off or trying to wash the dishes or clothes. People will be eating off of dirty dishes. They'll be wearing dirty smelly clothes. And imagine being dirty for weeks at a time.

Second, we should try to conserve water so people can drink it. If the summers stay hot and the water supply runs low then people can die from dehydration. People need water to live. Without water, nothing can live.

Most importantly if we don't have any water, we will not have and food. Animals need water in order to live and if there aren't any animals then we aren't going to have any meat to eat. Plants also need water to live. Meat and vegetation is over half of our diet and without them we can't live. Also we need water to give to trees because the trees are our main source of oxygen. Without trees we won't be able to breath.

As I have stated above we will not have water for our necessary needs. Also people can die from a lack of drinking water. Most importantly we will not have any water to give to the animals, trees, and vegetation. Without a fresh and constant water supply, mankind will no longer be.

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GO ON

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Sincerely Yours,

Although this response is formulaic (a typical five-paragraph format), it contains the elaboration necessary for a score of 3. The writer generates three reasons in support of water conservation and develops each reason by using a cause-and-effect strategy. The first reason, for example, is based on the notion that "...we should try to conserve water so we can use it for necessary things." The writer develops this reason first by providing a scenario in which the water needed for daily hygiene and chores will not be available ("Imagine taking a shower and the water cuts off or trying to wash the dishes or clothes") and then by showing the consequences of this shortage of water ("People will be eating off of dirty dishes...And imagine being dirty for weeks at a time"). The third reason, the most complete and therefore strongest demonstration of cause and effect, shows how the interrelationships among humans, animals, crops, and trees create an absolute dependence on water (e.g., "Animals need water in order to live and if there aren't any animals then we aren't going to have any meat to eat. Plants need water to live. Meat and vegetation is over half of our diet and without them we can't live"). To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to develop some of the existing reasons in more detail. For example, with additional specific development, the second reason ("...we should try to conserve water so people can drink it") would provide more effective support for the writer's position.

SCORE POINT 3

STOP

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor:

The water in Texas is becoming scarcer every year. One reason is the hot summers that Texas has dries up our water supply. Another is the increase in population, many people are moving into Texas each year. If Texans help by limiting their uses of water in their home we can help reduce the water shortages drastically.

The hot summers that all of Texas has each year dries up our water supply. With average temperatures in the high 90's and low 100's much of the water is evaporating before our very eyes. On the coast of Texas rain is not much of a problem but in the center around San Antonio, Austin, and out to El Paso it hardly ever rains in the summer causing drought conditions. If Texans do not limit or watch their water supply Texas will become another Sahara Desert.

Another problem that Texas has with its decreasing water supply is the fact that more and more people are moving into Texas each year with the increase in population the more water we use. Some cities in Texas such as Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas are having more and more people move into these cities than any other in the United States. Over a period of time if these people don't limit the amount of water they use people will start moving out of Texas and that could cause economic problems.

If we as Texans start to limit the amount of water we use in homes, we can start planning for and feel better about the future. Eventhough the water problem in Texas is not in desperate need of help, we should not let it ever get to the point where we are low on water.

IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE, CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

GO ON

In this response the writer provides two moderately elaborated reasons in support of limiting the use of water in homes. These reasons are based upon the two causes of the growing scarcity of water ("...hot summers and a growing population") that are explicitly stated in the prompt. The writer develops both reasons with specific details, creating an effective argument. For example, the writer begins his or her explanation of the second reason with a statement linking the population growth in Texas to its water problems ("Another problem that Texas has with its decreasing water supply is the fact that more and more people are moving into Texas each year"). The writer develops this idea by specifying the chain of events that is precipitated by this problem. That is, the migration to Texas cities such as "Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas" causes an increased consumption of water; the eventual result of this increased consumption (if people do not limit their use of water) is water shortages, which will lead to people leaving the state, thus causing "economic problems." This response is concise and controlled, with each sentence contributing to its overall persuasiveness. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to explain more fully the existing reasons or provide additional relevant and elaborated reasons to support his or her position.

SCORE POINT 3

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

To the editor of the Hereford Brand,

Dear Sir,

In regard to your question; What is your position concerning the issue of water limits, I believe that water should not be limited.

Personally, here in the Texas Panhandle, we could not handle water limits. most of the people who live here are farmers, ranchers, and cattle breeders. These people need all the water they can get.

Cows drink more water than humans, fields need to be watered almost everyday due to the heat, and the farmers have other animals to worry about. People in the Texas Panhandle suffer through severe heat and winds. We need water to avoid dehydration while working our children depend on water to cool off with. many a summer day you will see all the pools overflowing with children and adults alike, trying to escape the summer heat. Other children are playing in sprinklers while their parents water the yard.

With a water shortage people could not water lawns or go for a swim to cool off. Instead we would be fighting over people using more than their share, families fighting over who got the most water and whole cities

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complaining because prices go up because farmers can't water their crops.

So as I have stated and shown, here in the Texas Panhandle, to many people depend on us for food and other supplies that we could not live with a water shortage.

A concerned citizen,

In this response the writer uses his or her personal experience--living in the Texas Panhandle--as the basis for a convincing argument against limiting the use of water. The writer presents three reasons in support of this position. He or she develops the first reason ("Most of the people who live here are farmers, ranchers, and cattlebreeders") by specifying why this group of people needs to have an abundant supply of water available to them (e.g., "Cows drink more water than humans, fields need to be watered almost everyday..."). Because the writer's second reason ("People in the Texas Panhandle suffer through severe heat and winds") is both specific and detailed, it provides the strongest support for his or her position. This level of elaboration is not sustained throughout the response, however. In the last reason, which is based on the possible consequences of a water shortage ("...we would be fighting over people using more than their share..."), the writer's discussion of families and cities fighting over water use is only minimally developed. In addition, the response has some organizational weaknesses caused by the writer's problems with paragraphing. Instead of devoting a body paragraph to each reason, the writer overlaps reasons from one paragraph to another (e.g., the first reason begins with the second sentence of paragraph two and extends through the first sentence of paragraph three), which causes some confusion. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to improve the organizational structure of the response as well as to provide more consistent elaboration throughout, maintaining the specificity and thoroughness with which the second reason was developed.

SCORE POINT 3

STOP

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear editor,

Water shortage in Texas is a community problem rather than a state problem. Some places in this state does not have a need to worry about water. Then again, some communities, for example, big cities, have a water shortage during the summer.

The places that do not have a problem are normally in the country. I live in the country and we have well water. As to my knowledge we have never had a water problem. We probably use ten times as much as the normal person, because of the animals we have. I can honestly say that I don't think we will ever run out of water.

We get season rains. This provides us with a new supply of water every year. There are also under under ground streams that provide us with water. For these reasons I do not think that people that live in the country will ever have a water shortage problem.

On the other hand, people living in the city might have a problem. I know for a fact that they are limited to the amount of water they use. My sister lives in the city and she has certain times she is allowed to water her grass. They are also allowed only ten minutes to take a shower in the mornings.

These people might be concerned with the water supply. This problem is due to the.

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population. There are so many living in the city that someone is going to be careless and leave the water running. If a normal household is about four people then you have forty minutes, in the morning, of running water. In forty minutes you can use alot of water.

Alot of people buy drinking water. They rather have this water, than city water. City water has all them harsh chemicals in it. This can help the problem.

I think with proper use of water there will not be a need to worry about water. If there comes a time to worry, the cultural agricultural program can find many ways to consirve water. There soon may be many different ways to recycle water, but lets hope it will not come to that.

Sincerely,
A Texas citizen

STOP

This response is based on an implied, qualified position rather than on an explicit "pro" or "con" stance on the issue of water conservation. An implied position is allowed if the response clearly supports a consistent position. Because students are given more latitude to respond at the exit level, they are also allowed to qualify their position and, if they choose, to take a broader approach to the topic than that specified in the prompt. In this response the writer's position is that some communities need to conserve water, and some don't (the extent to which a community must conserve is dependent on the amount of water available in that community compared to the amount of water needed). To support this position, the writer explores two communities' widely varying views of the water problem. He or she begins by using the example of the absence of a water problem in his or her own community ("I live in the country...As to my knowledge we have never had a water problem"). The writer believes that, although water use in rural areas might be higher than normal, seasonal rains, underground streams, and the use of wells will keep these areas from ever having a water shortage problem. The writer then presents a view of the water shortage problem in cities. He or she acknowledges the likelihood of a water problem and uses a personal example ("My sister lives in the city...") to establish that people living in cities already "are limited to the amount of water they use" because of the population problem in these areas and the amount of water wasted by people living so close together. The specific information the writer includes about each community's view of water provides convincing support for his or her implied, qualified position. To achieve a higher score, the writer would need to provide additional specific reasons or more detailed information about the existing reasons in support of his or her position.

SCORE POINT 3

STOP

SCORE POINT 4

4 = RESPONSES THAT ARE CONSISTENT, SPECIFIC, AND ELABORATED. THE WRITER ACHIEVES SUCCESS WITH THE PERSUASIVE TASK BY TAKING A POSITION AND PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR THAT POSITION THROUGH REASONS, SOME OF WHICH ARE CLEARLY AND LOGICALLY DEVELOPED. THESE RESPONSES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY MOST OF THE FOLLOWING:

- ***Specific, well-elaborated reasons.*** The reasons are presented in such a way that they provide convincing support for the writer's stated position.

- ***A consistent organizational strategy.*** Although minor lapses may occur, these responses have a clear sense of order and completeness, as evidenced by the effective use of introductory, transitional, and concluding elements. If an otherwise well-written response ends abruptly because the writer has run out of space, the paper is still eligible for a "4."

- ***Consistent control of the written language.*** Though the writer may not incorporate all of the appropriate mechanics or conventions of language, the response is effective by virtue of its overall clarity of expression and fluency.

In addition, these responses may present some special feature that makes them particularly effective, such as:

- Highly effective word choice, including especially apt or striking words, phrases, or expressions.

- Particularly descriptive details or illuminating illustrations.

- Especially thoughtful reason or reasons that offer an unusual perspective or a broader view of the situation.

- An unusual persuasive strategy that is carefully carried through.

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

In accordance to the prevention of water shortages in Texas, I am writing to say that I feel that the limitation of water in Texan homes, for water conservation, is a very logical, and important attempt to conserve water.

First of all, the limited supply of water, in each Texan home, will provide Texans with a sense of responsibility. In other words, Texans will begin to realize just how precious, as well as how non-replenishable the water supply is. By limiting water supply into Texan homes, it will teach Texans how to preserve, and conserve their valuable water.

Secondly, limited use of water in Texan homes will provide Texas with a greater amount of water for the years to come. Whereas, if Texans were to be without a limited household water supply, the water, which could have been saved, and used only in true necessity, will have been used up. Texans depend upon water too much for it to become non-existant. Texans could no longer do the simple things, such as, drinking a glass of water, rinsing the soap from their body as they would shower, or using boiling water to mix with their oatmeal for breakfast.

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The list of waters enumerous uses reads on-and-on. It is up to Texas, and Texans to keep water, and its uses, a plentiful resource.

Lastly, water limitations in Texan homes are necessary to allow everyone the same amount of water. This would prevent one person from getting too much water, or from one person getting too little. Water, like everything else in our world must be shared. It is not any individual's place to take advantage of a resource which must be conserved for Texans, as well as other human beings, to survive.

I hope that by writing this letter, it will help to show other Texans how important water, and limitations upon the supply of water, into Texan homes, truly is. I only hope that Texans realize the importance of water limitations before there is no more water to limit. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Although this response is not as fluent as many other "4" responses, the amount of elaboration, consistent organizational strategy, and clear focus contribute to its overall effectiveness, earning it a score of 4. The writer supports his or her position (in favor of limiting water use in the home) by illustrating the advantages of water conservation. For example, in paragraph two he or she shows the positive effects of limiting water: it "will provide Texans with a sense of responsibility," making them "realize just how precious, as well as how non-replenishable the water supply is" and teaching them "how to preserve, and conserve their valuable water." The writer's last reason (..."water limitations in Texan homes are necessary to allow everyone the same amount of water") provides an unusual persuasive approach to the issue because the advantages of water conservation are linked to the equitable distribution of water to all people in the world, which the writer claims is necessary to ensure human survival in the future. The response as a whole provides convincing support for the writer's stated position.

SCORE POINT 4

TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

The scarcity of water in Texas has begun to present an enigma to residents of the Lone Star State. During the hot summers, water seems to come in an infinite supply through garden hoses, sinks, and fountains, and as a result, people use it freely. This excessive use, however, further depletes Texas' already diminishing supply. Some groups in the state propose regulations to the amount of water used by each household. Such regulations would span a long distance in Texas water conservation.

Several natural factors have also contributed to the loss in the water supply. Some of these may be solved; others are predicted to get worse. For example, scientists predict that the "greenhouse" effect will definitely become a greater threat. This means more to Texas and other Plains states than to the rest of the country because of the lack of trees and greenery. Not enough plants grow to protect the soil from the harsh sun.

Another natural factor is that the aquifers, which Texans have depended on for years, are quickly withering away from abuse and overuse. Farms all across the state depend on these natural resources. If they should dry up, the state's economy could dry up with them.

One resource could be turned in Texas' favor. Texas holds many miles of coast on the Gulf of Mexico. This water is presently unusable for the lack of an efficient method of converting salt water to pure water. However, with the surge in technological innovations within the past

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decade, a large-scale water conversion factory is not out of sight. A factory such as this could solve the problem.

Texans can not depend on the hope that a water conversion factory may be invented at some indefinite time in the future. They must act now to conserve the water available to them. Limitations on the amount of water consumed by the people may seem inconvenient, but could they live with the consequences of a state with no water?

This response achieves a 4 because of its fluency, clarity, and specificity. The writer chooses an unusual persuasive strategy by employing a circular argument. In the first three paragraphs, he or she presents a detailed description of the man-made and natural factors contributing to "the loss in the water supply" in Texas. For example, the writer states that the aquifers "are quickly withering away from abuse and overuse." Because farms depend on them for their water supply, the writer goes on, if the aquifers "dry up, the state's economy could dry up with them." Having established the potential depletion of the water supply, the writer foresees the possibility of relief if "a method of converting salt water to pure water" can be found, permitting the state to capitalize on its "many miles of coast on the Gulf of Mexico." However, following this conjecture, the writer is quick to point out that "Texans can not depend on the hope that a water conversion factory may be invented at some indefinite time in the future. They must act now to conserve the water available to them." The writer ends the response by suggesting that the only conservation strategy currently feasible is "limitations on the amount of water consumed by the people." The overall progression of thought is subtle, controlled, and effective.

SCORE POINT 4

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Dear Editor,

One of the most current and pressing problems in Texas today is the shortage of water. Many cities are or have recently been rationing water [redacted]. Perhaps it has affected farmers most since a loss of water means that they cannot water their crops. In turn, this affects the rest of us through shortages of crops. Perhaps a critical statewide drought and depression is in our future if we do not do something now.

The population of Texas has grown considerably in the last decade and these added inhabitants greatly increase the demand for water. There are so many things that Texans use water for. Each new Texan uses a tremendous amount of water a year and the demand keeps multiplying with every new citizen.

Another reason for this problem is the evaporation of water. Texas summers are extremely hot, as we all know, and much of our water is evaporating. After changing to water vapor, much of this water simply blows away to other states, and Texas loses even more water. Also, many times in the summer, Texas goes without rain for long periods of time. Unfortunately, these are natural occurances, and we have no control over them.

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Although we can do nothing about the evaporation and loss of rain problems, we can control the difficulties that result from population growth. Something has to be done for this problem. If our population continues to multiply, the water shortages will multiply even faster. We must accomodate for our population problem. Perhaps Texans are using, or more realisticly, wasting, too much water. The answer is that we shouldn't waste any water.

Many Texans have fallen into the habits of letting the water hase run in their garden, letting the sink run when they are brushing their teeth or doing other things, or taking long showers instead of baths. Ordinary household habits like there multiplied by everyone who does them proves to be a considerable waste of water. Too many Texans are taking water for granted and they are causing severe problems.

Think of all the millions of gallons of water we would save if every Texan stopped wasting water and started using only what they needed. If everyone started limiting their use of water, our problem would soon be almost obsolete.

This response achieves success with the persuasive task by virtue of its thoroughness, specificity, and sense of order. The writer's organizational strategy is clear, and there is a logical progression of ideas that leads the reader to the writer's final conclusion: "If everyone started limiting their use of water, our problem would soon be almost obselete." The writer begins by arguing that there is indeed a water shortage and that it is a critical problem. He or she then moves into a detailed discussion of some of the reasons for this shortage (population increases, hot summers, evaporation of water). Finally the writer ties these reasons to the issue of water conservation, arguing that we have no control over some of the factors contributing to the water shortage but that we do have control over how much water we use and should therefore avoid wasting any water. He or she gives detailed descriptions of ways in which Texans currently waste water and concludes by arguing that the problem could be resolved if every Texan stopped wasting water. Each of the writer's ideas in this response is sufficiently elaborated to be clearly understood and convincing. In addition, precise word choice throughout the response (e.g., "critical statewide drought and depression," "natural occurances," "difficulties that result from population growth") contributes to the effectiveness of the writing. Overall, this response constitutes a convincing and persuasive argument for limiting the use of water.

SCORE POINT 4

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TAAS Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
Part 1 - Written Composition

Grade 11

Fact: the Ogalala aquifer and other water sources like it are being depleted. Fact: Texans are running out of water. Resolved: Something must be done about the crisis ahead.

Many citizens and legislators of this state say that the people of Texas should limit the use of water in their homes. I contend to you that this is indeed not necessary and that there are alternatives that can be utilized. The primary topics of discussion are: water treatment plants, secondly salt-water treatment, and lastly water hyacinth.

First, the earth has exactly as much water on it as it did at the dawn of time. No water has left the planet, but where has it gone? Man has used the one percent of fresh water on the planet haphazardly and now billions of gallons of water lie in sewage. This water must be cleaned and treated. When this is done, a major part of the problem will be solved.

Next, think to the greatest source of water on this little planet, the oceans. Two-thirds of the world are covered by water, but one thing keeps this endless source from being used: salt. A way to filter the salt out of ocean water must be found. There are billions of cubic kilometers of water waiting to be used. More money must be poured into research to conquer this crisis. Moreover, the country that pioneers this technology would gain billions of dollars in revenue. Who could possibly refuse that?

Finally, there is the case of the water hyacinth. At the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow or EPCOT. All

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of the water used is treated sewage, but, they use a natural treatment "plant" On the perimeter of the colossal park lies a series of large glass building. Sewage is pumped into the buildings and racks of plants are lowered onto the surface of the waste. The roots of the plants lower into the water and they actually feed off of the sewage. Within a day or so, the water is to the point that only three chemicals need be used to make the water 100% pure. Such a project, on a larger scale, would prove invaluable to a state in Texas' position.

In conclusion, no, Texas citizens should not be made to limit the amount of water used at home, but the state should take action at once to purify the lakes of refuse lying around us. I have proposed three excellent ways of remedying the problem. Treatment Plants must be established A way to filter the salt from ocean water needs to be found and a water hyacinth program should be implemented at once. There are more efficient ways of handling the problem than regulating our water, which solves nothing but prolongs the crisis.

Sincerely,

STOP

This response is a thorough, well-organized, and fluent persuasive argument in which the writer acknowledges that Texas water is being depleted and that "something must be done about the crisis ahead"; however, he or she takes the position that limited water use in the home is not necessary because more effective solutions to the problem exist. For example, the writer provides specific, detailed explanations of the processes of water purification and desalination. Although these explanations focus on how to solve the water shortage crisis (rather than why Texans should not limit water use at home), they function as elaboration because they support the writer's position that there are alternatives to individual limits of water use at home. The writer maintains this focus throughout the response, carefully building a convincing, persuasive argument in support of alternate water conservation measures. In addition, the consistent use of vivid and precise language (e.g., "the Oqalala aquifer and other water sources like it are being depleted"; "Man has used the one percent of fresh water on the planet haphazardly"; "the country that pioneers this technology would gain billons of dollars in revenue") contributes to the overall effectiveness of the response.

SCORE POINT 4

Appendix

OBJECTIVES AND INSTRUCTIONAL TARGETS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
Exit Level

DOMAIN: Written Communication

Objective 1: The student will respond appropriately in a written composition to the purpose/audience specified in a given topic.

- Vary word and sentence choice for purpose and audience
- Write compositions incorporating information from sources other than personal experience
- Write informative discourse of a variety of types
- Write persuasive discourse of a variety of types
- Use various composition models as aids in developing writing skills
- Use formal and informal language appropriately
- Use aural and visual stimuli for writing
- Evaluate content

Objective 2: The student will organize ideas in a written composition on a given topic.

- Use the composing process to plan and generate writing
- Evaluate organization of writing
- Write descriptive, narrative, and expository paragraphs

Objective 3: The student will demonstrate control of the English language in a written composition on a given topic.

- Evaluate appropriate transition, clarity of language, and appropriate word and sentence choice
- Use the forms and conventions of written language appropriately
- Use parts of speech effectively in sentences
- Use the fundamentals of grammar

Objective 4: The student will generate a written composition that develops/supports/elaborates the central idea stated in a given topic.

- Demonstrate clear and logical thinking in support and development of a central idea
- Evaluate topic development

Objective 5: The student will recognize appropriate sentence construction within the context of a written passage.

- Recognize complete sentences and avoid fragments and run-ons
- Combine sentence parts and sentences to produce a variety of sentence structures including simple, compound, and complex

Objective 6: The student will recognize appropriate English usage within the context of a written passage.

- Use common affixes to change words from one part of speech to another
- Use correct subject-verb agreement with nouns, personal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, and compound subjects, and use correct pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Recognize correct verb tense and correct form of tense of irregular verbs, and avoid faulty shifts in tense
- Use the appropriate forms of adjectives and adverbs and the correct case of pronouns, and avoid the use of double negatives

Objective 7: The student will recognize appropriate spelling, capitalization, and punctuation within the context of a written passage.

- Use the fundamentals of spelling
- Use appropriate capitalization
- Use the fundamentals of punctuation

NOTE: The wording of the instructional targets was taken for the most part directly from the essential elements as delineated in the *State Board of Education Rules for Curriculum*.

ELIGIBLE TYPE OF WRITING AT THE EXIT LEVEL

At the exit level only persuasive writing is eligible for assessment. A definition of this type of writing, along with a description of both the writing prompt and successful student responses, is delineated below.

> Write a composition in which a position is formulated on a given issue and reasons that would support the position are presented in a convincing manner to a formal audience.

Description of Writing Prompt

1. The prompt will elicit a composition which has a persuasive purpose. The response may employ either the narrative, classificatory, or descriptive mode or may combine elements of the three modes in its presentation.
2. The prompt will ask the student to formulate a position on a specified topic and then to present convincing reasons in support of that position.
3. The prompt will require the student to respond in a formal manner to an interested, though an objective and impartial, audience.
4. The prompt will be written either as a statement or as a question.
5. The prompt will contain vocabulary appropriate for beginning eleventh grade students.
6. The prompt will focus on a real-life issue appropriate to the interests and experiences of beginning eleventh grade students.

Description of Successful Responses

1. The response will contain sufficient elaboration of the reasons presented to be convincing in support of the writer's stated position.
2. The response will contain a clear sense of order and completeness as evidenced by the effective use of transitional, introductory, and concluding elements as well as by the logical ordering of all body paragraphs. The response may employ any organizational strategy which proves effective and persuasive.
3. The response will contain language appropriate to a formal persuasive task. This objective may be accomplished through the effective use of persuasive language — that is, through precise and correct words, phrases, and expressions of thought.
4. The response will be characterized by an overall fluency in the expression of ideas.

EXPLANATION OF PURPOSE AT THE EXIT LEVEL

At the exit level the student is required to write a composition that has a persuasive purpose. That is, he or she must formulate a position on a specified topic and then present reasons in support of that position with the intention of influencing a particular audience. The nature of the issue requires the student to respond to a formal audience. A formal audience is defined as an objective and impartial adult audience, as opposed to an audience of peers, familiar adults, or school personnel. For example, the student may be asked to respond to the specified topic by writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper or to his or her state senator.

The exit level composition focuses on a practical writing task that relates to a current social issue. This writing task is less directive than those required of students at the lower grades, for it demands that students make the kinds of independent decisions they would have to make in responding to a real-life issue. For example, the student is given considerable latitude in both formulating a position and expressing his or her ideas: what position he or she takes with regard to the specified issue is an individual decision. Although the student may take a "pro" or "con" stance, he or she is not limited to these two positions. He or she may also recognize the merits or the drawbacks of both sides, or may "qualify" a "pro" or "con" position by favoring one side over the other while still acknowledging the legitimacy of the other side. Whatever position the student takes, it is essential that it be explicitly stated early in the composition so that the reader can clearly determine whether the student's reasons support his or her position in a convincing manner.

The most common problems regarding purpose at the exit level are listed below:

- Responses in which the student does not sustain a consistent position. In these responses the student may take a position and provide some support for it, but he or she also presents support for the opposing side that is equal to or greater than that provided for the stated

position. Such responses are unsuccessful if the information in support of the stated position is insufficient to provide a minimally sound case. For an example of this type of purpose problem, please see student response P-5 on pages 54-55 of this handbook.

- Responses in which the student may state a position but fails to provide minimal support for it, instead proposing a solution without connecting it to a defense of the position. Because these responses tell "how to" rather than "why," they are primarily informative rather than persuasive. For an example of this type of purpose problem, please see student response P-6 on pages 56-57 of this handbook.

- Responses in which the student merely provides information about both sides of the issue <u>without stating a position</u>. Because the student does not specify that he or she is taking a neutral position, these responses are considered to be classificatory rather than persuasive. For an example of this type of purpose problem, please see student response P-7 on pages 58-59 of this handbook.